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TOWER HILL.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

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WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

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TOWER HILL.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BOOK THE FIRST.

ANNE OF CLEVES.

I.

HOW KING HENRY THE EIGHTH RODE TO ROCHESTER TO MEET HIS FOURTH BRIDE.

One fine day, in the early part of the year 15[illegible] his Majesty King Henry the Eighth, attended by s[illegible] half-dozen horsemen, rode from his palace at Greenw[illegible] towards Rochester.

The King was very sumptuously arrayed in a double of purple velvet, embroidered with gold of damask, the sleeves and breast being clasped with large diamond buttons. Round his neck he wore a splendid collar, garnished with rubies and pearls. His girdle was adorned with emeralds and other precious stones, as was the poniard that hung from it, and his velvet cap glittered with jewels.

His charger was milk-white, with bridle and saddle

of red morocco leather, and the steed had need to be powerful, considering the enormous weight of his rider.

Despite the robust exercise which he took, habitual indulgence in the pleasures of the table had told its tale upon the King, and of late he had greatly increased in bulk. But he was still a magnificent personage. The expression of his countenance was stern and haughty, and his demeanour imperious.

On this occasion, Henry was attended by his brother-in-law, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, who was quite as large a man as himself, the Lord Dacre of the South, Lord Mountjoye, Sir Anthony Browne, Master of the Horse, and Adrian Culpepper, nephew to the Duke of Norfolk, a very handsome young gallant, and a great favourite with the King.

All these were richly apparelled, the Duke of Suffolk being only surpassed by his Majesty in splendour; while Culpepper's slight and graceful figure was shown to advantage in a doublet and hose of blue velvet, puffed with white satin.

With them, and mounted on a palfrey, was a drolling wight, whose vocation was proclaimed by his motley garb, the coxcomb on his head, and the bauble which he held in his hand. This was Will Sommers, the King's jester. He was privileged to say what he pleased to his royal master. No one resented his jibes.

Henry was in a remarkably good humour that day, as will not apppear surprising when we mention that he was about to pay a private visit to his intended bride, the Princess Anne of Cleves, who had just arrived in England, and was lodged for the moment, with her suite, in the Episcopal Palace at Rochester. He was impatient

to behold her, for he had heard rapturous descriptions of her beauty.

The King had now been more than two years a widower. Not voluntarily, for he had made several attempts to obtain another spouse. But his reputation was too terrible; none could be found bold enough to hazard a union with a monarch who had divorced his first wife, beheaded the second, and sacrificed the third to save her child.

Within a month after the death of Jane Seymour, he offered his hand to the Duchess of Milan. She declined, significantly remarking that, if she had two heads, one should be at his Majesty's disposal. His next overtures were to the beautiful Marie de Lorraine, sister to the Duke de Guise; and, being refused by her, he proposed to Madame de Montreuil; but with no better success.

Discouraged by these and other refusals, he abandoned his matrimonial project for the moment, and consoled himself as best he could.

After the lapse of a couple of years, his Vicar-General, Cromwell, proposed an alliance with Anne of Cleves, sister to one of the Princes of the German Protestant Confederacy, confidently asserting that he could bring about the match, if it pleased his Majesty.

Personal beauty being a primary consideration with Henry, he wished, before deciding, to be satisfied that the Princess was as charming as Cromwell represented her.

Accordingly, Hans Holbein, the Court painter, was despatched to Cleves for the purpose. A lovely miniature of the Princess was sent to the King, who was enraptured with it, and no longer hesitated.

An offer of his hand was forthwith made to Anne,

and accepted. The Duke of Cleves was highly gratified by the important alliance, and his sister, though full of misgiving, yielded to his wishes.

The negotiations being quickly and satisfactorily concluded, the Princess, with fifteen ladies of her suite, travelled by easy stages to Calais, where she was long detained by contrary winds.

At last, she was able to cross the Channel, and, on arriving at Dover, was received by the Earl of Southampton, Lord Admiral of England, Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and a host of nobles, Church dignitaries, and gentlemen. By them she was conducted in great state to Canterbury.

Thence she proceeded to Rochester, on her way to Greenwich; and it was at this juncture that Henry, who could no longer control his impatience, was resolved to meet her. Cromwell had resolved that their first interview should take place in public, but his plan was defeated by the King.

The contriver of this ill-starred match, which was destined to be fatal to himself, was then at the summit of his power. Thomas Cromwell, at this time Prime Minister, and the most important personage in the realm, was the son of a blacksmith, at Fulham, and had served as a common soldier, under the Constable de Bourbon, at the siege of Rome. On his return to England, he became secretary to Wolsey, with whom he remained till the downfall of the great Cardinal. He was next employed by the King, who had previously noted his extraordinary abilities, and found him an able and unscrupulous instrument in all his rapacious and tyrannical measures. Cromwell suggested the spoliation and suppression of the monasteries and other religious houses; and at his in-

stance, the sumptuous shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, at Canterbury, was stripped of its treasures. While enriching his royal master by this pillage, Cromwell did not neglect himself, nor were his services unrewarded by the King. Henry heaped favour upon favour upon him; appointing him, successively, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Privy Seal, Chief Justice, Vicar-General, and Vicegerent at the head of the Church. Four years previously, he had been created Baron Cromwell, of Okeham. He was now made Earl of Essex, with the post of Lord High Chamberlain, and obtained the Garter. By the King's decree, he took rank next to the princes of the blood royal.

Though obsequious to the King, whose will he never dared to dispute, Cromwell was arrogant and overbearing to all others. He made Wolsey his model. But his moral influence over Henry was not so great as that exercised by the Cardinal, as was shown by the unrestrained violence to which the King now gave way.

Cromwell, as will readily be supposed, had many powerful enemies, chief among whom were the Duke of Norfolk, Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and Wriothesley, principal secretary. Confident in the security of his position, he derided their threats and machinations.

Religious parties were then equally balanced; the crafty King, in order to prevent a preponderance on either side, alternately favouring those who professed the new doctrines, and the adherents to the old religion.

At this juncture, he inclined towards the Reformed Church, of which Cromwell was the chief pillar. Believing that the King's marriage with a Lutheran Princess would be a master-stroke of policy, inasmuch as it must necessarily lessen the influence of the Romish party, and consolidate his own power, the wily minister planned and

brought about the match with Anne of Cleves. With what result will be seen.

The King, as we have said, was in unwonted good humour. During the ride, he conversed affably, almost familiarly, with his attendants, and his lusty laugh—what a laugh it was!—was heard, as he jested with Will Sommers.

Ever and anon he opened a little ivory box, fashioned like a rose, containing the miniature painted by Holbein, and feasted his eyes upon the charming countenance represented. He even indulged his attendants with a glimpse of the portrait, and they all, with the exception of Will Sommers, professed unbounded admiration of the fair Princess.

"I reserve my opinion till I have seen her Highness," said the jester; "I judge not by a picture. Painters, as you well know, gossip, are greater flatterers even than courtiers."

"Beshrew thy scurril tongue! Dost call our trusty Hans Holbein a flatterer. Did he flatter our dearly-loved and much-lamented Queen Jane? Did he flatter our royal self, in any of his portraits?—ha!"

"I own he did not flatter *me*," rejoined the jester, "but then I am not a king, or a princess, or even a noble. Will it comfort you, gossip, if I say that if the Princess Anne of Cleves be as fair as she is here pictured, you will have a peerless bride?"

"Thou art right," cried the King, laughing. "Thanks to my Lord of Essex, I have gained a prize at last. I owe this treasure to him. By my faith, 'tis a lovely countenance," he exclaimed, again rapturously contemplating the miniature. "Her eyes are as bright as the stars, and her tresses like threads of gold. Look at her, Adrian

Culpepper—look at her, man, and tell me if thou hast seen aught comparable to her?"

"Her Highness is wondrously beautiful," replied Adrian. "Yet, methinks," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "I could find one to match, if not surpass her."

"Surpass her! ha!" exclaimed Henry. "Thou art in love, I perceive, Adrian; and I therefore pardon thy presumption. But who is she whom thou venturest to rate above the idol of our heart?"

Adrian looked confused, and regretted what he had said.

"Evade not my question," cried the King, keeping his eye fixed upon him. "Who is she?"

"Forgive my stupidity, my liege," observed Adrian. "I referred to my cousin, the Lady Catherine Howard."

"What! the daughter of Lord Edmund Howard, and niece of his Grace of Norfolk? Is she so passing fair? 'Tis strange I have not seen her! Can she have been at court, and have escaped our notice?"

"No, my liege. She is still very young—scarce eighteen—and lives in perfect seclusion at Lambeth, with her grandmother, the old Duchess of Norfolk."

"Such a flower must not remain unseen," said Henry. "She shall be maid of honour to our bride."

"My cousin Catherine is more fitted for a convent than a court, sire."

"Pshaw! she will change her notions. She is very beautiful, you say?"

"I think so, my liege. But my opinion is of little account. Pardon my indiscretion. I will never again venture to compare her with the Princess Anne of Cleves."

"But I will," interposed the jester, who had been

listening to their discourse. "You might have spared yourself the trouble of sending to Germany for a spouse, gossip Harry. Had you consulted me instead of my Lord Cromwell, I would have recommended the Lady Catherine Howard. I have seen her, and I swear by my bauble that she is of incomparable beauty."

"Go to!—thou art incapable of judgment," cried the King. "A kitchen wench would be a beauty in thy sight. But let us on. I am eager to get to Rochester."

From the brow of a woody hill, which they soon afterwards attained, a magnificent panorama was spread out before them, comprehending the junction of the Medway with the Thames.

The most striking feature of the prospect was Rochester Castle, with its lofty Norman keep. Close beside the castle, which towered above the picturesque houses of the old city, stood the cathedral, and near to this reverend pile was the Episcopal Palace, wherein Anne of Cleves was lodged.

It was towards the latter edifice that Henry's gaze was directed, and his impatience to behold his lovely bride became uncontrollable.

He rode on quickly, much more quickly than was pleasant to his steed, and did not slacken his pace till he approached the old fortified bridge, with its gate-towers and drawbridges that then crossed the Medway.

Henry's visit being wholly unexpected, great was the surprise of the sentinels on the outer walls of the castle, as he and his attendants came in sight. Trumpets were instantly sounded and drums beaten, and a guard of archers hurried to the gates, which were thrown open to his Majesty.

But the King having signified his pleasure to Sir

Thomas Cheyney, governor of the castle, who came forth to meet him, that no demonstration should be made, the trumpets and drums were speedily silenced, and not a cannon was fired, though the gunners had their matches lighted.

Dismounting from his charger in the inner court, with the assistance of Sir Thomas Cheyney, Henry despatched Sir Anthony Browne and Adrian Culpepper with a loving message to the Princess Anne, acquainting her with his arrival, and begging to be allowed to present himself. He then proceeded to the Barons' Hall—a vast, but sombre apartment, with an arched stone roof, supported by massive columns.

Here a collation was speedily set before him by the governor, and he did ample justice to it, for his ride had made him hungry. He had just concluded his repast, and emptied a large cup of Gascoigne wine, when his emissaries returned.

Something in their manner struck him. He expected they would have been loud in their commendation of the Princess, and their reticence in this respect displeased him. He looked hard at Sir Anthony, but could read nothing in the knight's impassive countenance, and Adrian Culpepper avoided his searching glance.

The three nobles who were standing behind the royal chair likewise questioned Sir Anthony by their looks, but with no better success than the King. The jester, however, fancied he detected a lurking smile on Culpepper's lip.

"Well, what have you to tell me?" demanded Henry.

"Her Highness greets you lovingly, sire," replied Sir Anthony. "She thanks you most heartily for your good-

ness in coming to meet her, and will be delighted to receive you if you will deign to visit her."

"But how did you find her, Sir Anthony? Tell me that?" cried the King. "Is she as beautiful as she hath been reported to us?—ha!"

"She has a very noble presence, sire, and an extremely engaging manner. I did not study her countenance," replied the wary old courtier.

"You went there to little purpose," observed Henry, gruffly. "But let us hear what Adrian Culpepper has to say. He has an eye for a fair dame, as we know."

"Her Highness is a right noble lady, my liege, as Sir Anthony has just described her," replied Adrian. "She is on the same splendid scale as your Majesty—tall, well-proportioned, and majestic in deportment."

"A mighty fine woman, I warrant her!" exclaimed the King, well pleased. "But what of her features?"

"I am unable to satisfy your Majesty; for, in truth, I was so dazzled that I could not distinguish them clearly."

"Struck blind?—ha!"

"Your Majesty has said it," rejoined Culpepper, bowing.

"By St. Mary! I think ye are both trifling with me," said Henry. "But I will see her, and judge for myself."

"That were best, sire," observed Sir Anthony. "To my mind, the Princess is all that could be desired, and will make your Majesty a suitable consort."

"Something is wrong," whispered Suffolk to Mountjoye. "Neither of them dares offer his real opinion."

"That is quite clear," replied the other. "We shall learn the truth anon."

Will Sommers made a slight gesture to Culpepper, but the young man took no notice of it.

Henry now arose, and, accompanied by his attendants, and by Sir Thomas Cheyney, proceeded to the Episcopal Palace.

The strange reserve exhibited by Sir Anthony and Culpepper had caused him a momentary uneasiness; but this feeling fled, and all his former ardour returned. He again glanced at the miniature, and thought it more lovely than ever.

On reaching the Episcopal Palace, he was ceremoniously received by the nobles and gentlemen in attendance on the Princess, and conducted to the apartments assigned her.

Anne of Cleves was expecting her royal bridegroom, with far more dread than impatience. She was surrounded by her ladies, all of whom were richly dressed, but in the Dutch style, which was not becoming.

The Princess herself was attired in a gown of cloth of gold raised, which displayed her really noble figure to advantage. Her head was covered with a caul of beaten gold, above which she wore a round velvet hat, decked with pearls and diamonds. Her stomacher blazed with precious stones, but beneath all this splendour there was a trembling heart, and her agitation increased, as she heard the King's imperious voice in the antechamber.

Next moment, the arras that masked the doorway was drawn aside, and Henry rushed impetuously into the room.

But he had not advanced far, when he suddenly stopped, as if he had beheld the Medusa's head.

On entering, he thought the Princess of Cleves a superb woman, fully equal to the extravagant notions he had formed of her. But before he had taken many steps, the illusion vanished, and he soon comprehended the deception that had been practised upon him.

In person, the Princess was lofty and commanding, but beauty of feature she had none—less than none. Her face was seamed by the small-pox, and the regularity of the outline was destroyed by the ravages of that fell disorder.

These blemishes had been artfully concealed by Holbein, who had painted the Princess as she might have been before the disfiguring attack.

Henry stared at her, aghast, and did not recover his composure for some moments. The three nobles, who stood behind him, looked almost equally confounded.

Sir Anthony Browne and Culpepper exchanged glances, and the grinning countenance of the jester, who remained in the rear, showed how much the malicious varlet enjoyed his royal master's confusion.

Seeing that the King did not move, Anne, almost in terror of her life, advanced slowly towards him, with her ladies bearing her train, and made a profound obeisance.

Henry's first wrathful impulse was to turn his back upon her, and depart without a word. But, conquering his anger and disgust by a powerful effort, he tried to assume a gracious demeanour, and addressed a few kindly words to her. His looks belied his speech. Anne perceived plainly enough the aversion with which she had inspired him, and her heart sank within her. She endeavoured to reply to his greeting, but words failed her, and she burst into tears.

Instead of being touched by her distress, Henry was still more disgusted. Consigning her to her ladies, he abruptly quitted the room, leaving the unhappy Princess and those with her in a state of indescribable dismay.

Deaf to the remonstrances of the Duke of Suffolk, who had more influence with him than any one else, and without vouchsafing a word of explanation to Sir Thomas Cheyney, who was thunderstruck by his sudden change of manner, and besought him to remain for a few hours at the castle, Henry ordered his horses, and rode back with his attendants to Greenwich, continuing silent and moody all the way, and sternly repelling any attempt at converse with him. Even Will Sommers did not dare to hazard a jest.

On his arrival at the palace, the King's angry looks alarmed all the yeomen of the guard, pages and grooms of the chamber, collected within the great hall through which he passed. A fearful storm was evidently brewing, and they only hoped it might not descend on their own heads.

Addressing a gentleman usher, the wrathful monarch inquired for the Earl of Essex; and his eye shot lightning fury when he heard that the Lord High Chamberlain was in the palace at the time.

"His lordship came hither in his barge not half an hour ago," said the usher; "and he seemed much surprised and disturbed to learn that your Majesty had gone to visit the Princess of Cleves privily at Rochester."

"He will be more surprised and disturbed when he learns that I have come back so soon," rejoined the King. "Bring him to me straight."

II.

CROMWELL, EARL OF ESSEX.

GREENWICH was Henry the Eighth's favourite palace. He preferred it to York Place (as Whitehall was then styled), or even to Hampton Court. All his palaces—Windsor Castle included—were delightfully situated near the Thames; two of them, Greenwich and Richmond, on the very banks of the river. Greenwich he loved, because it was his birthplace; and because the happiest hours of his life had been spent within its park and in its halls. He had dwelt there for many years tranquilly with Catherine of Arragon, before he dreamed of a divorce. He had wooed Anne Boleyn within its bowers, and had there been first subjugated by the attractions of Jane Seymour. What recollections, tender and terrible, were connected with the long galleries and tapestried chambers of the palace! Of late, they had seemed gloomy and desolate. But with a new Queen, lovelier and more loving than those who had gone before her, Henry hoped to bring back all the former gaiety of his Court.

The Palace of Greenwich, which, in Henry the Eighth's time was of vast extent, as well as of remarkable architectural beauty, was originally built by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who, from its charming site, named it Placentia. It was greatly enlarged by Henry the Seventh, and completed by his son, who loved it, as we have seen. The fine old structure, which had become ruinous from neglect, was pulled down by Charles the

Second, who commenced the magnificent edifice, known as Greenwich Hospital, on the spot.

As lovers of antiquity, we may be allowed to regret the picturesque old Tudor palace, in which Mary and Elizabeth were born, and in which Edward the Sixth was born, and died. The beautiful park, with its woody acclivities which surrounded the palace, was full of deer; and Henry, in his active days, used often to continue the chase through the forests fringing Blackheath, as far as Dartford and Gravesend.

The gardens of Greenwich Palace were enchanting. A charming terrace ran along the banks of the river, and on this terrace Cromwell was now walking. He was alone, and so pre-occupied, that he neither noted the many vessels on the river, nor bestowed a single glance at the stately palace close at hand.

Cromwell was a great politician, and the principles he professed and acted up to were thoroughly Machiavelian. "The great art," as he confessed to Cardinal Pole, "was to penetrate through the disguise with which sovereigns are wont to veil their inclinations, and then to devise expedients for their gratification, without appearing to outrage morality or religion." He was now thinking over his last stroke of policy, by which he hoped to destroy the Romish party.

Cromwell had long passed the meridian of life, but there were few marks of age about him. His features were large, strongly accentuated, and austere in expression. He was as carefully shaven as a priest, but wore his hair long. His costume, which accorded well with the gravity of his looks and deportment, consisted of a doublet and hose of black Genoa velvet, and a cap of the same material. The sole ornament that he wore

was the collar of the Garter, which was suspended from his neck. Over all he had a gown of russet velvet, furred with sables.

Many curious eyes were watching him from the Palace windows, as he paced to and fro on the terrace. His arrogant manner rendered him unpopular with the royal household; and sneering remarks on his obscure origin were constantly made behind his back.

He was vexed that the King had gone to Rochester; and fearing that mischief would ensue from the visit, was preparing for it, when the approach of the usher roused him from his reverie.

Notwithstanding his habitual command over himself, Cromwell slightly started, and his sallow cheek flushed, when he heard that the King desired to see him instantly.

"Already returned!" he exclaimed.

"Ay, my lord; and I fear his Grace has not been well pleased by his visit. I never saw him in a worse humour, and heaven knows I have often seen him angered."

"What can have happened to displease him?" demanded Cromwell, uneasily.

"I know not, my lord," replied the usher; "unless he is dissatisfied with his bride."

"Dissatisfied with her!—impossible!" cried Cromwell, frowning. "Lead me to him."

The room to which Henry had withdrawn, and where Cromwell found him, was called the Gilt Chamber, on account of its sumptuous decorations. On one side was a long table, covered with plate, which the King had received from Wolsey, and on the opposite side was a similar table, laden with the spoils from Becket's shrine.

Instead of arras, the walls were hung with cloths of gold, tissue, and baudkin of various hues.

At the further end was a chair of estate, the canopy of which was embroidered with the royal arms. But Henry had now contented himself with a large easy chair, covered with crimson velvet. In this he sat, resting his foot upon a cushion. With him were all those who had accompanied him to Rochester. He wished them to be present while he vented his displeasure upon Cromwell.

Somewhat athirst after his ride, he had just refreshed himself with a deep draught of Rhenish, and was in the act of giving back the goblet to the page who served him, when Cromwell entered the presence.

"Soh! you are come!" he exclaimed, in a deep, derisive tone. "Accept our hearty thanks for the lovely bride you have procured us. Her charms exceed the rapturous descriptions you gave of them. Even Hans Holbein has failed to do her justice. She is a wonder!"

Affecting to take the King's observations literally, Cromwell replied, "I am glad to find your Majesty so well pleased."

"Thou liest, traitor!" cried Henry, starting up. "Thou knowest full well that I could *not* be well pleased, unless I were a besotted fool. Thou hast played me false! Thou hast beguiled me by thy lying praises of the Princess; and Holbein, whom I trusted, has lent thee aid in thy perfidious design! But I will crush ye both as I crush this picture!" he added, dashing the miniature to the ground, and trampling it beneath his feet.

Cromwell did not quail beneath this furious outbreak, but maintained a firm and composed demeanour.

"I am unlucky in incurring your Majesty's displeasure," he said, "but I cannot regret what I have done. I have provided you with a consort—as amiable in disposition as she is richly endowed in person. Your Majesty must be hard to please, indeed, if you are not satisfied with her."

"Hard to please!" roared Henry. "By St. Mary! thy assurance passes belief! Dost thou dare to maintain to my face that I can be mistaken in regard to the Princess? All present here have seen her; and if one among them will avouch that she is passably fair, or hath even a vestige of beauty left upon her cheeks, I will own myself in the wrong."

As he spoke, he glanced at his attendants, expecting they would confirm his words, but all remained discreetly silent, except Will Sommers.

"Do not appeal to me, gossip Harry," said the jester. "Her Highness hath one merit that ought to reconcile thee to a hundred defects. She is the largest woman I have ever seen!"

"Go to, knave!" cried Henry, with a look of ineffable disgust. "I can liken her to naught but a great Flanders mare!"

At this comparison a slight smile crossed the faces of all his auditors, except that of Cromwell.

"By St. Mary, I will not have her!" cried the King, emphatically. "You, my lord," he added, to Cromwell, "who have made the match, must unmake it. Send her back, without delay, to her brother, the Duke of Cleves. He is as much to blame as yourself for seeking to impose such an ill-favoured woman upon me!"

"I cannot do your Majesty's bidding," replied Cromwell. "I will not give such provocation to the Duke of

Cleves, who hath the power of making his resentment deeply felt, as to send back his sister to him. No, sire, the engagement you have entered into must be fulfilled. This is not the moment to embroil yourself with the princes of the German Confederacy. From the position of your affairs, you require their aid. You are on ill terms with the Emperor, Charles the Fifth. You have quarrelled with his most Christian Majesty, Francis the First. You are threatened with excommunication by his Holiness, Pope Paul the Third. Will you convert your potent allies into foes, who may shake the stability of your throne?"

"Find some expedient to break off the match, or look to yourself," said the King, in a menacing tone.

Cromwell made no reply, but the Duke of Suffolk interposed.

"A plan occurs to me, sire," he said. "The precontract between the Princess Anne of Cleves and Francis, Marquis of Lorraine, of which we have heard, would constitute a legal impediment to the marriage."

"It would!—it does!" exclaimed the King, eagerly grasping at the suggestion. "I thank you, my good brother. You have furnished me with an excellent pretext. I will act upon it. Go, my lord," he added to Cromwell. "See the Duke's ambassadors, Osliger and Hostoden, without delay, and raise the objection."

"It were idle to do so, sire," replied Cromwell. "The contract is void. Both the Princess and the Marquis were children of tender age when it was entered into, and it has since been formally annulled."

Seeing that the discussion was taking a dangerous turn, the Duke of Suffolk and the others withdrew to the

further part of the room, leaving the angry King and his resolute minister together.

"Thou canst free me from this hateful match if thou wilt," observed Henry, after a pause. "I desire to re-marry, but I will not wed this woman—by St. Mary, I will not!"

"You have no other choice, my liege," rejoined Cromwell, boldly. "I must speak plainly. There is not a noble dame in your dominions who would consent to become your wife."

So astonished was the King by this declaration, that he made no immediate reply, but remained staring at the Earl.

An impression had evidently been produced upon him, for he did not give vent to an explosion of wrath, as might have been anticipated.

"This is said to justify thy treacherous act," he said. "But it will not avail thee. Let it confound thee to learn that I have heard of a paragon of beauty, whom I will wed as soon as I am rid of this detested Anne of Cleves."

"To whom does your Majesty refer?" demanded Cromwell, somewhat uneasily.

"To one who is in all respects fitted to be my bride —to the Lady Catherine Howard, niece to the Duke of Norfolk."

This was a thunder-clap to Cromwell. Nevertheless, his firmness was unshaken.

"Doubtless your Majesty has ascertained the Lady Catherine's sentiments?" he remarked.

"Not yet," replied the King.

"Then you have been misinformed. The Lady Catherine Howard would decline the great honour you design for her."

"Thou think'st so," said Henry. "Her cousin, Adrian Culpepper, who is here, will tell thee differently."

"Question him, sire."

With this, he signed to Culpepper to come forward, and the young man instantly obeyed.

"Let not the question I am about to put alarm thee, Adrian," said the King. "The answer thou may'st give to it, be it what it may, shall not prejudice thee or any other person in my regard. Speak frankly and fearlessly. The Earl of Essex has just affirmed that if I were to offer my hand to thy fair cousin, Catherine Howard, she would decline it. Contradict it if thou canst."

Adrian was visibly embarrassed.

"My liege, I cannot contradict his lordship," he said, after some hesitation. "I entertain the same opinion."

"I will not ask thy reasons," rejoined the King, unable to conceal his chagrin. "Thou may'st retire."

Adrian bowed, and stepped back.

Cromwell secretly enjoyed his triumph, but allowed no manifestation to escape him.

"This will convince your Majesty that I was right," he said. "You had best not send back the Princess of Cleves."

"Must I, then, thrust my neck into this yoke?" groaned the King.

"There is no help for it, sire," replied Cromwell, with difficulty repressing a smile. "Hereafter, when the Princess's many admirable qualities have become apparent, you will thank me for my pains. Suffer me to bear a gracious message to her Highness, and relieve the distress into which she cannot fail to have been thrown."

"Do what you will—say what you please," rejoined the King, in a tone of resignation.

"Since I have your Majesty's authority," said Cromwell, "the Princess shall set forth from Rochester to-morrow for Dartford. Your Majesty will give your own orders for her reception here, and for the solemnization of the nuptials."

Bowing reverently, he withdrew.

As he went forth, he cast a look of triumph at Suffolk and the two other nobles, who had confidently expected his disgrace.

But his exultation would have been effectually checked, if he had seen the look that the King threw after him.

"Thou hast gained thy point," muttered Henry. "Thou hast forced me into this marriage. But it will cost thee thy head."

III.

FRANCIS DEREHAM.

THE shadows of night were falling on the Thames, as a small boat, rowed by a young and vigorous oarsman, shot past Lambeth, and kept close to the shore on that bank of the river, until it neared the gardens and park of an ancient mansion.

The young man then landed, and fastening his little bark to the roots of a tree, scaled a low wall, and gained the gardens of the mansion alluded to.

He was tall, and possessed a well-knit, sinewy frame.

His handsome features were bronzed by exposure to the sun of a warmer clime than his own; his locks were black, and harmonized with his almost tawny complexion; and his eyes were likewise black and fierce, and lent a somewhat sinister expression to his countenance.

Nothing in his attire betokened a person of rank, and yet his bearing was haughty. His doublet and hose were of philimot-coloured cloth, and his cap was destitute of ornament of any kind. A poniard, hanging from his girdle, was the sole weapon he carried.

He was evidently well acquainted with the garden into which he had penetrated, for he unhesitatingly plunged into a yew-tree walk, which brought him near to the mansion, without exposing him to observation.

At last, after one or two turns, which he took with some caution, he reached a small green enclosure, surrounded by clipped hedges, in the midst of which stood a rustic temple. In this little building he quickly concealed himself.

Night came on.

The moon arose, and her beams glittered upon the vanes and gables of the gray old mansion, and upon its immense bay windows. The mansion, which was the noblest in Lambeth, except the Archiepiscopal Palace, was then occupied by the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk.

The patience of the young man ensconced within the temple was severely tried, and he began to fear that he was doomed to disappointment, when a slight sound revived his hopes.

Looking out cautiously, he perceived a female figure within the enclosure.

Yes, there she stood before him, in all her matchless beauty. The moonbeams poured down upon her,

revealing the lovely outline of her countenance, rendering her pale complexion more pale, and heightening the lustre of her magnificent black eyes. Her form was slight, but exquisitely proportioned.

More than a year had flown since he had beheld her last, and during that interval her charms had developed — leaving nothing wanting to her beauty. Search England through and you could not have found one fairer than Catherine Howard.

Stopping at a short distance from the temple, she called out, in a low, musical voice, that vibrated through the frame of him who heard it, "Are you there, Francis Dereham?"

He instantly responded to the summons, and throwing himself at her feet, seized her hand, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

But she received him very coldly, and instantly withdrawing her hand, with a haughty gesture, bade him rise.

"No more of this, Francis," she said. "You must forget all that has passed between us. I have only consented to an interview, in order to tell you, with my own lips, that henceforward we must be strangers to each other."

Her looks and words produced such an effect upon him, that for some moments he could not speak. His countenance betrayed inward agony.

"Is this my welcome after our long separation?" he said, in a tone of mingled reproach and anguish. "Is your heart changed towards me? Have you forgotten the troth you plighted to me in yonder temple? Have you forgotten your vows, Catherine?"

"I do not desire to remember them, Francis," she

rejoined, in a freezing tone. "I was a foolish girl when I made them. They are not binding upon me. I wish to be relieved from them."

Each word she uttered pierced his heart like the point of a dagger, and again momentarily deprived him of the power of speech.

"You no longer love me, Catherine," he faltered forth at last. "You have forsworn yourself. You have given your heart to another. What has happened during my absence? Tell me, I implore you!"

She averted her head, and remained silent.

Again he besought her piteously to afford him some explanation of her changed manner.

"Be content, Francis," she rejoined. "Do not press me further. Give me back my troth-plight, and let us meet no more."

"Give it you back, Catherine?" he exclaimed, with a sudden burst of fierceness. "No, no, no! You are bound to me by ties that no human power can sever, and which I will sooner die than unloose. You may have ceased to love me. You may have repented of your vows. No matter. I will force you to fulfil them!"

"Force me?" she exclaimed, with a disdainful laugh. "You are mistaken. The daughter of the proud Lord Edmund Howard, and the niece of the great Duke of Norfolk, the first peer of the realm, is no mate for the base-born Francis Dereham."

For a moment he seemed humbled by her scorn, but said presently, in a menacing tone, "I may be base-born, Catherine. I may have been one of the Duchess's retainers. But you are betrothed to me, and if you will not wed me, I swear you shall wed no other. Think not

to avoid the contract. I have a witness. You solemnly plighted your troth to me in the presence of your tire-woman, Mary Lassells!"

"Mary Lassells will never witness against me," returned Catherine. "She has long since disappeared. Besides, the promise so foolishly given to you was not freely made."

"Not freely made, Catherine!" he exclaimed. "Oh, this is enough to drive me distraught! Did I prompt the words you uttered? They came spontaneously from your heart. Deny it as you will, you loved me, then, Catherine, tenderly, devotedly. How often have we met, on evenings like the present, on this very spot! You would listen, then, to my impassioned words—ay, and respond to them. Have you no recollection of those stolen interviews?"

"I think of them only with shame and remorse, and would willingly efface them from my memory."

"You cannot so efface them, Catherine, any more than you can liberate yourself from the solemn engagement into which you have entered with me. Mine you are, and mine you shall remain. Have you informed the Duchess, your grandmother, of your betrothal to me?"

"She is the last person on earth to whom I would have confessed my folly. She believes that you—one of her gentlemen—had insolently dared to raise your eyes towards her grand-daughter. And she also believes—nay, is certain—that I was indiscreet enough to meet you in this secluded spot. But she knows nothing more. Had she known the truth, you would not have escaped with life. My secret will never pass my lips, even to my father confessor; and all your assertions,

should you dare to make them, will be met by flat contradiction on my part.

"What brings you back to torment me, Francis? I have heard nothing of you since your departure; but, some time ago, a rumour reached the Duchess that you had joined the terrible Ottoman corsair, Dragut, and had sailed with him to ravage the shores of Italy, Sicily, and Spain."

"The rumour was true," he replied. "On leaving England, after my dismissal by the Duchess, I went to the Isle of Gerbes, where I found Dragut, and formed one of the crew on board the brigantine which he himself commanded. I pleased the great corsair captain so well, that I was speedily promoted, and given the command of a galley.

"I have had so many escapes, that I begin to think I bear a charmed life. On one occasion, we had anchored in the bay of Giralate, between Calvi and Giaza, in Corsica, and were dividing the large booty we had obtained on the coast of Italy, when we were surprised and surrounded by a fleet of Genoese and Portugese vessels, commanded by old Andrea Doria, and Berenguel de Requessens. Though greatly outnumbered, we were as difficult to take as a nest of hornets. Most of our galleys, however, were captured. Mine was sunk. I saved myself by swimming, and was taken on board Dragut's brigantine. Andrea Doria chased us towards Sardinia and Sicily; and at last, finding escape impossible, we were obliged to fight him, and were beaten. We were confined in a strong fort near Ajaccio, but Dragut had plenty of ducats, and soon procured our liberation.

"We next sailed with the Calabrian corsair Ucchiali to Algiers, where I was presented to Khair Eddyn, the

sovereign. By him we were employed in the siege of La Goulette; and when this was over, Dragut set sail for Constantinople. Had it pleased me to remain there, I might have obtained a post under Sultan Solyman."

"Why did you not accept it?" exclaimed Catherine. "A great career might have been opened to you."

"It might, for I was befriended by Rostan Pasha; but a greater attraction drew me back to England. I had gained all I wanted.

"Listen to me, Catherine, I became a corsair for your sake. I went away poor; but I have come back rich. I have brought with me gold and jewels that would excite the envy of the Duchess herself. All my treasures are yours!"

"And think you I would accept such ill-gotten gains?" she replied, regarding him with horror. "You offer them to me with blood-stained hands! Of how many murders are they the produce?"

"They are spoils of war, to which I was fairly entitled. Remember that I fought under the Turkish flag."

"Are you a renegade, then, as well as a corsair?"

"No; I have not abjured my faith. But I was about to tell you that the chief part of my treasure was taken from Signor Pascalico—a noble Venetian, whose galley fell into my hands in the Adriatic. Pascalico defended himself bravely; but being obliged to yield, did so with a very good grace, and presented me with a chest full of golden ducats, as well as a casket of jewels.

"You call my gains ill-gotten. But, by heaven! if I had pillaged St. Thomas à Becket's shrine, as the King has done, the sin would weigh far heavier on my conscience than any act I have committed."

"That was a sacrilegious act, indeed," said Catherine, with a shudder, "and will assuredly bring ill to the Lord Cromwell, who suggested it. But I can listen to you no longer. Nothing you can say—nothing you can offer—will alter my determination. We must part for ever. Return to Constantinople, and improve your fortunes with the Sultan. Who knows but you may become a pasha? Farewell!"

"No, Catherine!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand, and detaining her. "We must not part thus. For your sake, I have committed crimes on which I dare not reflect. I have imperilled my soul's salvation to bring you gold; and the fiend who tempted me shall not rob me of my prize. You shall be mine!"

"Never!" she exclaimed, energetically. "You have said enough to place your life in my hands; and if you dare to present yourself again before me, I will denounce you as a corsair. You know what will then be your doom."

"Catherine," he said, regarding her sternly, "you would not hold this language towards me, after what has passed between us, if you did not love another. But you cannot break the tie between us. It is a bar to any other union. You deem yourself safe because Mary Lassels has disappeared, but I will find her. As to your lover——"

"Francis, I have none," she interrupted. "Ever since your departure, I have lived in perfect retirement with the Duchess."

"Does that prove you have no lover?" he cried. "You were living in similar retirement when you smiled on me; and, for aught I know, may have quickly supplied my place. This mansion is not a convent, and the

Duchess of Norfolk is not an abbess. Nobles and gallants come hither, and some one among them may have become enamoured of you. Who is my rival?"

"I have told you that I have deeply repented of my folly in encouraging you, and I will tell you no more. You will come here again at your peril."

"I will come to claim you as my bride," he replied.

"Your bride! The bride of a corsair!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Release me instantly, or I will call for aid. Ha! some one comes—help!"

"Think not to escape me, Catherine. None other shall wed you—not even the King himself!"

With this he left her, and disappeared.

Scarcely was he gone, than Adrian Culpepper burst into the enclosure, and hurried towards her.

"What has alarmed you, Catherine?" he exclaimed, looking around. "Has any one been here?"

"I fancied some one was concealed in the temple," she rejoined.

"I will see," he cried.

After a moment's fruitless search, he returned, and said, "Reassure yourself. No one is there."

But remarking that Catherine still trembled violently, he added, "What is this? Something must have happened. Why have you come to this spot, which you have always shunned when we have walked forth together in the garden?"

"I will never come here again, Adrian. But let us return to the house."

"Stay a moment. There is nothing to fear. Before we go, I would fain learn why you dislike this spot? What unpleasant event has occurred here? I thought you had no secrets from me, Catherine."

"Nor have I," she rejoined, trying to force a smile, "but do not question me now. Some other time, when I am more composed, I will tell you all. Hist! I am sure I heard some one stirring amid the trees!"

"'Tis mere fancy," he rejoined, after listening for a moment intently. "But I will search the alley, if you desire it."

"No," she replied; "do not leave me. I did not expect you to-night, Adrian. I thought you were with the King at Greenwich."

"I have just returned," he replied. "My first inquiries, as you may be sure, were for you. The Duchess told me you had walked forth to enjoy the moonlight. I sought you on the terrace, but in vain. I should never have looked for you here, had I not heard your cry. But let us dismiss that subject; I have news that will surprise you. The King spoke of you to-day."

"The King spoke of me?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, he announced his intention of making you one of the maids of honour to the new Queen."

"To what am I to attribute the honour of his Majesty's choice? He has never seen me."

"He may have heard of you. But I cannot allow you to accept the post, Catherine."

"Nay; I must needs obey, if the King commands. But how do you find the Princess of Cleves? Is she as lovely as reported."

"Lovely!" he exclaimed; "she is destitute of all personal attraction. His Majesty was most wofully disappointed, and would have broken off the match at once, if Cromwell had not pointed out to him the impolicy of such a proceeding. So he will go through with it. But I will stake my existence that he will divorce the Queen

before three months are over, and then look out for another spouse, according to his custom."

And he again laughed loudly.

"A sad prospect for the Princess!" exclaimed Catherine.

"I cannot pity her. Besides, the King has been tricked—not by her, perhaps, but by her brother, the Duke of Cleves, and Cromwell. He bargained for a beauty, and they have given him a perfect fright. However, she will do as well as another to have her head chopped off."

"Dreadful! I wonder he can find a wife. I would not wed him, if he were to offer me his royal hand."

"I told him so this very morning."

"You told his Majesty that I would not accept him?" cried Catherine, in extremity of surprise.

"Merely in jest, of course."

"I did not imagine the King would tolerate such a jest. Besides, you had no warrant for it."

"I felt sure you would not risk your head with such a capricious tyrant, Catherine. But I tell you, it was merely a jest."

"I hope the King will not be offended with me."

"Poh! he will think no more about it. I might have told him that you are already engaged to me."

"Then you would have told him an untruth, Adrian. But let us go. The Duchess will chide me for staying out so late."

With this, they left the place together, and proceeded towards the mansion.

As soon as the coast was clear, Francis Dereham issued from the bosquet in which he had been concealed.

"So Adrian Culpepper is my favoured rival!" he ex-

claimed. "Had I yielded to my first impulse on making the discovery, I should have stabbed him to the heart. But I am glad I stayed my hand. Revenge is in my power. She shall never wed him. Never will I release her from her plighted troth—I swear it before heaven! Oh, Catherine—Catherine! you are false and forsworn; but I love you still, and you shall yet be mine!

"But, before I act, I must obtain the support of some powerful noble—some enemy of the Howards. Who so able to help me as the Lord Cromwell? He is the mortal foe of the Duke of Norfolk, and would willingly lower his Grace's pride. My treasure will enable me to purchase Cromwell's protection. I will seek an audience of him to-morrow.

"But I have more to do. Mary Lassells has been got out of the way, but her retreat can easily be discovered. When I have found her, I can act.

"Catherine, our next meeting shall not be here, but in the mansion from which I was ignominiously driven. I will claim you as my bride from the proud Duchess. You have scorned me, but I shall triumph in the end."

Confident in the accomplishment of his purpose, he quitted the garden in the same way that he had entered it; and, unloosing his boat, rowed down the river.

IV.

CROMWELL HOUSE.

In the time of Henry the Eighth, and, indeed, during the whole of the Tudor dynasty, many nobles had large mansions within the walls of the City of London. The Earl of Bridgewater had a house in the Barbican, the Marquis of Dorchester, and the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland, had houses in Aldersgate Street. Nor is this surprising. The City of London was not then the populous hive it has since become; but entirely composed of those picturesque mediæval buildings that delight the painter, and comprehended within the circuit of its ancient walls hundreds of beautiful structures—to say nothing of the grand Gothic cathedral, with its lofty spire shooting to the sky.

Among the palatial edifices to which we have referred, one of the largest and stateliest was that built by Cromwell, Earl of Essex.

Cromwell House stood where Drapers' Hall now stands, in Throgmorton Street. The street, it may be incidentally noted, did not receive its present designation until Elizabeth's reign, and was called after Sir Nicholas Throgmorton, who had a house there. To make way for his mansion and gardens, the Earl of Essex swept away a multitude of small habitations, and reared, as we have said, a magnificent pile in the very heart of the City. On the north, his residence commanded a view of Finsbury Fields, and the charming country beyond; and on

the south it looked upon the Thames, upon London Bridge, and the Tower.

But, like Wolsey, Cromwell did not long enjoy the palace he had built. He was struck down in the plenitude of his power, and his superb mansion being forfeited to the Crown, was purchased by the wealthy Drapers' Company, and converted into their hall. The old house was burnt down in the great fire of London, and replaced by the existing structure.

Though proud and ostentatious as the great Cardinal himself, Cromwell was too prudent to provoke Henry's anger and jealousy by a display of splendour such as had been exhibited by Wolsey; yet he, nevertheless, lived in sumptuous style, and practised unbounded hospitality.

Three long tables were daily spread in his banqueting-hall, and the number of guests was unlimited. His establishment was not larger than those of the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, or of some other wealthy noblemen of the period, but it was princely. He had a band of gentlemen pensioners, who wore his liveries, and were adorned with massive chains of gold. Some of these were of high family, and had all servants of their own.

Among the superior officers of his household were a high-chamberlain and vice-chamberlain, both of whom were clad in velvet, and carried wands, gentlemen ushers and yeomen ushers, grooms of the chamber, a priest, and an almoner. It is scarcely necessary to particularize the host of pages, lacqueys, carvers, cup-bearers, and servers.

On the morning after the events previously described, a tall, richly-dressed personage, who was no other than Francis Dereham, approached the gates of Cromwell House.

Very different looked Dereham—in his satin, damask doublet and hose, in his velvet cap, ornamented by a diamond brooch, and with a long rapier at his side and a dagger at his girdle—from the mysterious individual who had secretly visited the Duchess of Norfolk's garden at Lambeth.

Owing to the richness of his apparel, the haughtiness of his deportment, and the extreme darkness of his complexion, those who beheld him took him for a Spanish grandee; and they were confirmed in the notion that he was a personage of distinction and a foreigner, from his strange attendant.

This was a young Morisco, habited in his native flowing costume, and wearing a snowy turban, that contrasted strongly with his tawny skin and crisp, black beard. His eyes were fine and black, and his teeth like ivory.

Mourzouk—for so he was called by his master—was tall and athletic. He stared fiercely at those who regarded him too inquisitively. His costume was completed by red morocco boots, and a yatagan was thrust under the scarf tied round his waist.

As Dereham drew near the mansion, he signed to Mourzouk to keep close behind him, and strode haughtily through the guards stationed in front of the gateway. Without pausing to speak to the gate-keeper, he marched into the great quadrangular court, which was filled by various officers of the household.

On seeing him and his sable attendant, a gentleman-usher advanced to meet him, and bowing profoundly, asked if he could serve his lordship.

Dereham undeceived the usher as to his rank, but contrived to propitiate him by a handsome fee, and

signified that he desired an immediate audience of the Earl of Essex on a matter of importance.

Thereupon the usher begged him to follow him, and took him into the house.

Mourzouk awaited his master's return in the court, and was exposed to a great number of inquisitive remarks, to all of which he replied by looks and gestures of angry impatience, from which it was inferred that the ignorant infidel did not understand what was said to him.

Meanwhile, Dereham was led by the usher along a corridor to a large tapestried ante-chamber, where several persons were waiting for admittance to the minister.

Dereham was not long detained, for he again found a golden key efficacious; and, though he arrived last, was first to be introduced into the Earl's private cabinet. The bland usher explained that the worshipful gentleman's business was pressing and important, and the others were obliged to give way.

Cromwell was alone at the time, his secretary having just left the room. He was seated at a table, covered with papers and despatches. A scrutinizing glance at Dereham, as the latter came in, convinced the astute minister that his visitor was a bold and unscrupulous adventurer. He received him with courtesy, but did not invite him to be seated.

"If I heard your name aright, it is Francis Dereham," he observed. "I should not have taken you for an Englishman. You have rather the air of a Spaniard, or an Italian. I have seen several valiant captains, like you, at the head of the bands of the Constable de Bourbon. But you are too young to have been at the siege of Rome."

"Would I had been there with your lordship, to

plant the first ladder on the walls of the Eternal City," replied Dereham. "But at that time I was a page to the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk."

"A page to the Duchess of Norfolk—ah!" thought Cromwell. "This man has a secret to reveal. But you have served, I am sure?"

"Not on land, my lord, but at sea."

"Under the Earl of Southampton?"

"Not under our own flag, my lord, but under that of the Sultan."

"How! you have fought with infidels against the Christians! Am I speaking to a renegade?"

"No, my lord, I am as devout a believer as any in his Majesty's dominions. I will disguise nothing from your lordship. Since my dismissal by the Duchess of Norfolk, for a reason which I will presently explain, I sought to enrich myself in the quickest manner possible, and I therefore joined those bold cruisers who are to be met with on the coast of Africa. I sailed with Dragut and Ucchiali. We were lucky in making many prizes. But I am tired of the lawless life I have led, and would fain purchase pardon and protection from your lordship."

On hearing this frank confession, a slight smile lighted up Cromwell's grave countenance.

"You would purchase my protection, you say? How?"

"I pray your lordship to look at these jewels, which I took from a wealthy Venetian in the Adrian Sea—in fair fight, my lord—in fair fight."

And he placed a casket before him.

"Magnificent!" exclaimed Cromwell, examining the gems. "The King has none finer."

"I am glad you admire them, my lord. They are yours."

"I will not refuse the gift," replied Cromwell. "But before promising you protection, I must know why you were dismissed by the old Duchess of Norfolk. Answer me frankly!"

"I have said that I will hide nothing from your lordship. I was dismissed for daring to raise my eyes towards her grand-daughter, the Lady Catherine Howard. But you will not blame me too severely when I add that I was emboldened by my fair young mistress to declare my passion to her."

"Did the Lady Catherine requite your love? Again I counsel you to speak frankly."

"My lord, she plighted her troth to me."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed Cromwell, astounded. "Do you affirm that the Lady Catherine Howard is betrothed to you?"

"She is, my lord—solemnly betrothed. I regard her as my wife."

Cromwell could not conceal his satisfaction.

"If this be true," he thought, "it will not be possible for the King to wed her, if he should divorce Anne of Cleves."

Then turning to Dereham, he said, "You shall have her. I will lend you aid. I hate the Duke of Norfolk. The marriage of his niece with one of inferior degree will be gall and wormwood to him; and, moreover, will mar his projects."

And he laughed bitterly.

"From whatever motive your lordship may be induced to aid me, I thank you heartily," said Dereham. "But I am bound to explain that, since my return, a new difficulty has arisen. Catherine refuses to fulfil her contract."

"She is fickle, like the rest of her sex," observed Cromwell, "and has found a new lover in your absence. Have you discovered your rival?"

"Ay, my lord; it is her cousin, Adrian Culpepper."

"I could have guessed it," replied Cromwell. "Adrian Culpepper is a handsome gallant, and a favourite with the King——"

"He shall never wed her," interrupted Dereham, fiercely.

"Be patient. I do not mean that he should. You have a witness to the contract—ha?"

"I have, my lord."

"Rest easy, then. You can enforce compliance with it. I was about to say that Adrian Culpepper has powerful interest, but the King himself cannot set aside a pre-contract. Leave the matter to me. I will see to it."

"Oh, my lord, words are inadequate to express my gratitude. You have raised me from the depths of despair. Count on my devotion. My life is at your disposal."

"I may put your gratitude to the proof, ere long. I have said that you shall have the Duke of Norfolk's niece, and I will make good my word. But you must control your impatience. Other matters claim my immediate attention. His Majesty's nuptials with the Princess Anne of Cleves will be solemnized at Greenwich to-morrow, and till that important affair is settled, I can think of nothing else. Are you willing to enter my service? If so, you shall have a suitable post in my household."

"I desire nothing better!" cried Dereham, eagerly.

"From this moment, then, you are one of my officers. I will give orders to my majordomo respecting your lodging."

"While thanking your lordship for your goodness, I must mention that I have a Morisco with me, whom I delivered from captivity, and who obeys me like a slave. I would not willingly part with him. Have I your permission to retain him?"

"Certainly! Each of my principal officers has his own servant; and if you prefer a Morisco, I see no objection to the arrangement."

At this moment an usher entered the cabinet.

Seeing he had a message to deliver, Dereham drew back. The communication made to him, in an undertone, caused Cromwell to bend his brows.

"How!" he exclaimed. "The King gone to Lambeth, you say?"

"Ay, my lord. He rode thither from Greenwich, not an hour ago, attended only by young Adrian Culpepper. Most likely his business is with the Archbishop."

"No, that is not his errand, Reresby. Order my horses instantly. I, myself, must go to Lambeth."

"How many attendants will your lordship take with you?"

"Only this gentleman—Master Francis Dereham—who now belongs to my household. Bid the majordomo make all preparations for him."

"It shall be done, my lord," replied the usher. "The horses shall be brought round from the stables at once. Have you any further command?"

Cromwell replied in the negative, and the usher bowed, and departed.

"Can you guess what takes his Majesty to Lambeth?" observed Cromwell to Dereham, as soon as they were alone.

"Partly, my lord," replied the other, uneasily.

"'Tis to see the Lady Catherine Howard. His curiosity has been excited respecting her, and he cannot rest till he has gratified it."

"This bodes ill for me, my lord," observed Dereham, in a sombre tone.

"Do not despair. Your prize shall not be wrested from you. 'Tis fortunate you came to me, and put me in possession of the secret. I now know how to act. Await me in the court-yard. I will join you there anon, and we will then ride with all speed to Lambeth."

Shortly afterwards, the Earl of Essex and his new attendant were crossing London Bridge. They were followed by Mourzouk, who was mounted on a barb.

V.

THE DOWAGER DUCHESS OF NORFOLK.

On that same morning, but at a much earlier hour, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, with Lady Rochford, and her lovely niece, the Lady Catherine Howard, attended mass in the chapel belonging to the Duchess's mansion at Lambeth.

Their religious exercises over, the three ladies proceeded to the refection hall, where the morning repast had been set out for them.

At all her meals, the Duchess was served with great state, though she herself ate and drank most sparingly, and not unfrequently fasted altogether.

As usual, the chief officers of her household were as-

sembled in the hall, and breakfasted at a separate table, the only person permitted to sit with her Grace being her chaplain, Father Anselm, and a Franciscan friar.

Some traces of the beauty of her youth still lingered about the Duchess's sharp features, but their main expression was austerity, the natural consequence of the ascetic life she led. No smile ever played upon her thin lips.

Rigorously adhering to the stiff costume of the preceding reign, when she had figured in Court ceremonies and pageants, she wore a deep white wimple round her neck and shoulders, and her plain frontlet, or forehead cloth, was covered by a large diamond-shaped headdress of snow-white linen, with a long veil at the back.

Beneath her outward apparel she wore a garment of horse-hair—a self-inflicted penance. From her girdle was suspended a rosary, the beads of which were of gold, enamelled black and white.

Such was the austere dame by whom the fair Catherine Howard had been brought up, and it is scarcely to be wondered at that the dreary and monotonous existence to which the light-hearted damsel was condemned, should have led to the fatal step we have described.

Among the Duchess's numerous attendants none could compare, in point of good looks, with Francis Dereham. He soon perceived that he had attracted Catherine's notice, and was presumptuous enough to declare his passion for her. Unhappily, she listened to him, and consented to plight her troth to him in the presence of her tire-woman, Mary Lassells.

Some disclosures of her grand-daughter's imprudence being made to the Duchess, Dereham was instantly dismissed, and with his dismissal the affair was supposed

to be ended. Mary Lassells also disappeared, her silence having been purchased by Catherine.

When the tempter was gone, Catherine bitterly regretted her folly; but not hearing from him, she persuaded herself that he would not return, and that her secret would never transpire. Alas! she could not foresee her fate.

Subsequently, her cousin, Adrian Culpepper, appeared on the scene, and his passion for her soon effaced all recollection of Dereham. If she thought of him, it was only with abhorrence.

Lady Rochford, whom we have mentioned as being at mass with the Duchess, was Catherine's sole friend and confidante; but though her ladyship knew of the foolish love-affair with Dereham, she was not aware of the tie that bound them together.

Lady Rochford was the widow of Anne Boleyn's brother, Lord Rochford, who was brought to the block chiefly on the evidence of his wife. She was some years older than Catherine Howard, but still beautiful and captivating.

Having obtained a strong influence over the thoughtless girl, she used it rather to pervert her mind than to strengthen her moral principles. Though most decorous in her deportment towards the Duchess of Norfolk, Lady Rochford frequently provoked Catherine's laughter by ridiculing her austere grandmother behind the old lady's back.

When we first beheld Catherine Howard, it was under circumstances not peculiarly favourable to the display of her charms. Now that her demeanour was calm and composed, and her features unruffled, we may affirm that she looked perfectly lovely.

Finer black eyes could not be seen. Her charming head was sustained by a slender, swan-like neck. Her costume became her well. Her luxuriant black tresses were gathered beneath a diamond-shaped head-dress of rich stuff, which set her fair features as in a frame. A pearl necklace encircled her throat; and a black velvet robe, with a long stomacher, displayed the perfect symmetry of her figure.

Notwithstanding her apparent composure, her breast was troubled by painful thoughts. She could not forget the event of the previous night. With Adrian Culpepper, she had had but little discourse, beyond what we have related. Immediately on her return with him to the house, she had hurried to her own room; and before she arose in the morning, he was off to Greenwich.

As yet, she had said nothing of Dereham's re-appearance to Lady Rochford; and though she had great need of counsel, she could scarcely make up her mind to acquaint her with the exact truth. What would Lady Rochford think of her, if she knew she was contracted to this man?

The repast, as we have said, was conducted with great form. Plates, dishes, and flagons were of silver, and the viands were carried by the sewer, and placed on the table by the yeomen ushers. The Duchess broke a manchet, and ate part of it. That and a cup of water constituted her breakfast.

With the exception of Catherine, the others did better, especially the priest and the friar. Breakfast in those days was a good substantial meal, and the cold joints that composed it were washed down by no thin potations. Wine, ale, and mead were the beverages of our sturdy ancestors.

The chief topic of conversation during the repast, as may be supposed, was the King's approaching nuptials with Anne of Cleves. As the Princess was a Lutheran, and all the interlocutors were strict Romanists, the marriage could not but be highly objectionable to them, and Father Anselm expressed himself in the strongest terms against it, severely censuring Cromwell for having contrived it, averring that such a union must infallibly be calamitous to the adherents of the old faith.

Lady Rochford told him he need not be alarmed. Adrian Culpepper had seen the Princess, who was so ugly that the King was already disgusted, and was certain to divorce her.

"So much the better!" cried the Duchess of Norfolk, glancing at Father Anselm. "We shall have one enemy the less."

"And Cromwell will infallibly be disgraced," observed the chaplain. "So we shall regain our position."

Catherine was too much engrossed by her own anxious thoughts to take any part in the conversation; and as soon as the repast was ended, she intimated to Lady Rochford that she had something to impart to her; and they went up-stairs together to the long gallery, which occupied the north side of the mansion, and looked upon the gardens, the Thames, and the towers of Westminster on the opposite side of the river.

No one was in the gallery when they entered it. The portraits of the Howards on the walls alone looked down upon them. One portrait seemed to follow them with its melancholy eyes.

Well might Lady Rochford avert her gaze from it. It was the portrait of the husband she had destroyed.

"Let us move further on, Catherine," she said. "Now, what have you got to tell me? You look agitated."

"Something dreadful has happened, Isabel," was the reply. "The person I detest and fear most in the world has come back. Yes; Francis Dereham, whom I thought dead, has returned. I met him last night in the garden."

"Imprudent!" exclaimed Lady Rochford. "But what passed?"

"I told him I had only granted the interview to bid him farewell for ever—that I had ceased to love him—and that he must forget me. All I said had no effect. He reproached me bitterly with want of constancy, and even threatened me."

"Threatened you, Catherine!" exclaimed Lady Rochford, indignantly. "Oh, that you should have placed yourself in the power of such a villain! But you must be delivered from him. A threat of this kind can only be answered in one way."

"But who will deliver me, Isabel?" cried Catherine, distractedly.

"Adrian Culpepper!" replied Lady Rochford. "A word to him will suffice. He will stop the villain's tongue!"

"But I shall never dare to breathe the word, Isabel. Adrian is of so jealous a nature that if he thought I had ever loved another, he would tear me from his breast!"

"Let me speak to him. Dereham must be silenced. He cannot be allowed to throw out insinuations against the honour of a high-born damsel. There are some persons who would believe his slander."

"But you do not know how I am bound to him, Isabel."

"Bound to him, Catherine! I do not understand you," cried Lady Rochford, gazing at her in astonishment. "You cannot so far have forgotten your rank—you cannot have been so culpably foolish as to plight your troth to this man?"

"Isabel, you have guessed the truth!" replied Catherine, in a low voice, and casting down her eyes. "I am plighted to him!"

"Oh, this is too much!" exclaimed Lady Rochford. "You have brought dishonour upon a noble house, and must take the consequences of your folly and wickedness. I cannot help you."

And she turned to depart.

"Stay, Isabel!" cried Catherine, catching her arm —"stay, I implore you! When you know what anguish I have endured, what bitter tears I have shed, you will pity me. Dereham must have practised some sorcery upon me, or I could not have been so strangely infatuated. When he was gone, and I was no longer subject to his baneful influence, I awoke as from a dream. Then came remorse and repentance. I never loved him. I was bewitched, or I could never have plighted myself to him!"

"It was madness, truly!" observed Lady Rochford, coldly. "Such weakness passes my comprehension, and I should never have expected it in Catherine Howard."

"You canot blame me more severely than I blame myself, Isabel. For some time I was most miserable, and I had only just regained the happiness I had lost when this wretch, whom I now hate far more than I ever loved him, appears to blight me with his presence. Do not desert me at this frightful crisis, Isabel. You alone can save me."

"I ought not to help you, Catherine," returned Lady Rochford. "But I cannot see you suffer thus, unmoved. I will save you if I can. You are in fearful jeopardy. Now that I know precisely how you are circumstanced with Dereham, I say to you, more emphatically than ever, that only death can deliver you. The ties by which you are bound to him must be cut by the sword. Adrian Culpepper must provoke him—must kill him!"

"But suppose it should turn out otherwise! Dereham is a very expert swordsman, and might kill Adrian. Perhaps his threats were only idle, for I told him no power on earth should compel me to fulfil my vow. But if he should proceed to extremities—if he should venture to claim me—I have an assured means of deliverance, though I am loth to resort to it till the last moment."

"If you have any means of deliverance, do not hesitate to employ it," said Lady Rochford. "Such a venomous reptile must be crushed. Let me know how it can be done, and I will help you."

Before Catherine could reply, they were interrupted. An usher suddenly appeared from a side passage, and hurried towards them. It was evident from his looks that he had something important to communicate.

"Her Grace desires that you will not come down stairs for the present," said the man, who was almost out of breath.

"Wherefore not, good Gervase?" demanded Catherine, in alarm.

Her thoughts were running upon Dereham.

"Because the King has just arrived at the mansion," replied Gervase.

"The King!" exclaimed both ladies in astonishment. "Impossible!"

"No, 'tis quite possible—'tis certain. His Majesty is even now alighting from his steed in the court. He has come quite privately, and is attended only by Master Adrian Culpepper."

"What brings him hither?" demanded Lady Rochford.

"That's more than I can tell, my lady," replied Gervase. "All I know is, that the Duchess does not desire the Lady Catherine to be seen, and sent me off in haste to bid her remain up-stairs till his Majesty's departure. But I must not stand chattering here. My presence is required in the hall."

So saying, he departed as hastily as he had come, leaving them both filled with suprise at the unexpected incident.

VI.

HOW HENRY FIRST BEHELD CATHERINE HOWARD.

STRANGE to say, Catherine Howard had never seen the King.

Curiosity got the better of her, and notwithstanding the Duchess's interdiction, she resolved to have a peep at him, thinking she could do so safely.

Lady Rochford did not discourage her, for her own curiosity was equally excited, and they hastened to the head of the great staircase, whence, without being seen,

they could obtain a glimpse of what was going on below.

A great stir was heard in the entrance hall, which was filled with the various officers of the household, the chamberlain and ushers with their wands, the grooms of the chamber, gentlemen and lacqueys in the Duchess's livery.

In the midst of them stood the King, towering above the throng almost by the head and shoulders. He was magnificently dressed, as usual.

Behind him was Adrian Culpepper. Near the old Duchess, who advanced to meet his Majesty, and who comported herself throughout with great dignity, were Father Anselm and the Franciscan friar.

"What do you think of the King?" asked Lady Rochford.

"I think him the noblest-looking person I ever beheld, and very handsome," replied Catherine. "How provoking that the Duchess will not let us appear? I wonder what he is saying to her."

Henry did not seek to disguise the motives of his visit.

After the Duchess had thanked him in her stately manner for the honour he had done her, he replied,—

"Your Grace will marvel what has brought me here. I have heard such encomiums of the beauty of your grand-daughter, the Lady Catherine Howard, that I have come to see whether they are deserved. I have been so duped of late, as Adrian Culpepper will tell you, that I will trust only to mine own eyes in future."

This speech, though uttered in a very gracious tone, greatly alarmed the old Duchess, and she secretly congratulated herself on having kept Catherine out of sight.

"I am sorry your Majesty has taken so much trouble," she said, "especially at a time when you have other matters of far greater moment to attend to. Whoever described my grand-daughter in such terms to your Majesty"—glancing, as she spoke, at Adrian—"grossly flattered her. She has but few pretensions to beauty. She knows nothing of Court manners. I have never allowed her to go forth into the world, because she was early destined to a religious life; though that design," she added, with a profound sigh that did not escape the King, "has been necessarily abandoned, since we have now no religious houses. I am unwilling to disturb the serenity of mind which she has attained, and I pray your Majesty to spare her this ordeal."

"Go to, Duchess!" cried Henry. "You call it an 'ordeal;' but I am greatly mistaken if your fair grand-daughter—for fair she is, I am certain—will regard her presentation in that light. I must see her. If she answer to Adrian Culpepper's description, she shall become one of the Maids of Honour to our new Queen."

Strange to say, the Duchess did not seem to appreciate this offer—did not even return thanks for it.

"The illustrious Princess, whom your Majesty has chosen as your spouse, would not be likely to approve of her," she remarked, drily. "I have endeavoured to explain to your Majesty that Catherine is ignorant of Court life, and wholly unfitted for it. With profound respect, I am compelled to decline your gracious offer."

"You have lived so long in retirement, Duchess, that you know little of the world," observed the King, sternly. "The expression of our wishes is a command, and must be obeyed. Let us see your grand-daughter, without further parley."

Finding that nothing was left but compliance with the arbitrary monarch's will, the old Duchess resigned herself to it with the best grace she could.

She, therefore, gave some instructions, in a low tone, to the usher who had conveyed her previous message to Catherine and Lady Rochford, and then ceremoniously conducted the King to a large inner room, hung with tapestry, and richly furnished according to the taste of the time. The windows looked upon the garden, and the door, which was standing open, communicated with the terrace.

"By my faith, Duchess, you have a noble house!" cried Henry, glancing round approvingly; "and pleasant gardens. I must see them anon."

Meanwhile, a large fauteuil having been conveniently placed near a table by the attendants, the King seated himself in it. Cates and fruit were then served, of which he partook.

Wine was next proffered by a cup-bearer, and he had just raised a goblet of muscadine to his lips, when Catherine Howard and Lady Rochford, preceded by Gervase, entered the apartment.

Struck with astonishment and admiration of Catherine's surpassing beauty, Henry set down the cup untasted.

Adrian Culpepper, who was standing behind his chair, noted, with a pang, the effect that Catherine had produced upon him.

"Thou art right, Adrian!—thou art right!" cried the King, rapturously. "By St. Anne, thy cousin is most beautiful."

Catherine advanced slowly and timidly, scarcely daring to raise her eyes towards the King, though encouraged in a whisper by Lady Rochford.

However, the Duchess led her towards the royal chair, and presented her to his Majesty, who graciously took her hand, and raised her.

Catherine's eyes again sank before his ardent gaze, and her cheeks suffused with blushes.

"You have disparaged your grand-daughter, madam," cried Henry, to the Duchess, who was looking on with ill-disguised uneasiness. "I find her all that is charming."

"I beseech your Majesty not to fill her heart with vanity, and undo the good work which these holy men," designating the priest and the friar, who were standing near her, "have laboured to accomplish."

"She has been kept in ignorance of her beauty long enough, and shall hear the truth from my lips," laughed the King.

"She has been taught not to listen to idle compliments, sire,—come from where they may," said the Duchess.

"You did not turn a deaf ear to such speeches once upon a time, madam, and why should she?" cried Henry. "If you have renounced the world, with its pomps and vanities, there is no reason why your grand-daughter should renounce it. She shall not be immured as if she were in a convent," he added, frowning at the priest and the friar.

Then turning to Catherine, whose hand he had not yet relinquished, he added, "You must be sadly moped here, fair mistress. Come, confess the truth."

"Nay, sire; I am very happy with my grandmother," she replied, demurely.

"But you long for a change," interposed Lady Rochford. "Not many days ago, when I was describing a ball—a masque—a revel—or something of the kind, you

said that you would dearly like to be at Court among noble damsels of your own age, in order that you might participate in these gaieties and festivities, from which you are debarred."

"Nay, Isabel, you know I did not speak seriously when I said so," observed Catherine.

"You must have been serious, for you sighed as if your heart would break."

Henry laughed heartily.

"She sighed—ha!" he cried.

The priest and the friar lifted up their eyes in silent horror, and the old Duchess cried out sharply, "This is mere invention!"

"Let Kate contradict me, if she can," rejoined Lady Rochford.

Catherine made no response, but her looks could be easily interpreted by the King.

"You shall not sigh in vain, fair mistress," he said. "You shall attend on the Queen. You shall mix in all the gaieties of Court. Jousts shall be held at Greenwich expressly for your amusement, and I myself will splinter a lance at them."

"You hold out great temptations to my grand-daughter, sire," said the Duchess. "But I trust she will know how to resist them."

"Resist them! Ha!" exclaimed Henry. "God's death, madam! she shall not be kept here against her will. Speak, fair mistress! Will you tarry with your grandmother, or go to Court?"

Catherine felt that the Duchess's eye was upon her.

"I should be ungrateful if I were to leave my grandmother, sire, after all the kindness she has shown me, without her consent and approval."

A smile of triumph played upon the Duchess's thin lips.

Adrian was inexpressibly relieved by Catherine's decision; but Lady Rochford was surprised and vexed.

"Will you throw away this brilliant chance?" she whispered.

Henry was greatly mortified. He had felt sure that his offer would be eagerly accepted. His anger with the old Duchess for her opposition to his will was increased, though he did not then care to manifest his displeasure.

As if to make an end of the matter, he rose abruptly, and said to Catherine, "Show me the gardens, fair mistress. Since you never stray beyond them, you must be well acquainted with their beauties."

Catherine, of course, obeyed; and they stepped out, through the open window, upon the terrace, the others following at a respectful distance.

VII.

IN WHAT MANNER HENRY DECLARED HIS PASSION FOR CATHERINE HOWARD.

Henry did not bestow much attention upon the gardens, though they were charmingly laid out, having eyes only for his fair companion.

By this time, Catherine had recovered from the awe with which he had at first inspired her, and not unnaturally felt elated by his flattering observations. Now

that she dared to return the amorous monarch's glances, her dark eyes proved irresistible.

Catherine's personal attractions surpassed those of Anne Boleyn, or Jane Seymour, or of any woman on whom Henry's capricious affections had been fixed, and he could not help contrasting her with the unattractive Princess to whom he was to be united on the morrow.

Was it too late, even now, to retreat from that untoward engagement? As he gazed at Catherine Howard, and perused her lovely lineaments, each moment discovering some new beauty, he thought not.

Why not take this enchanting creature, in whom every perfection was centred, and who seemed formed for his happiness, as his Queen, and discard the other, for whom he had conceived the strongest aversion?

They had now reached the end of the terrace, and descending a short flight of stone steps, entered a lower walk.

"These are pleasant gardens," observed the King, gazing around with indifference. "But you will find those of Greenwich much pleasanter. I shall be doing you a great service in compelling you to come to Court."

"I pray you, do not, sire, for I should obey you with reluctance."

"With reluctance!" exclaimed Henry. "Do you share your grandam's opinions?"

"Not exactly, sire. I am not insensible to the splendid attractions of your Court, but——"

"You will eclipse all in it," interrupted Henry, passionately.

"Your Majesty forgets the Queen," returned Catherine.

"You will outshine her as much as the sun outshines the stars in splendour."

"Sire!"

"Why did I not see you before I formed this hateful engagement, Catherine? Why has the fairest damsel in the realm—the one whom I would first have chosen—been kept from my sight? Oh, Cromwell! Cromwell! I owe this to thee!"

"Think not of me, sire, I entreat you. Think of the Princess, who is to become your bride to-morrow."

"I think of her only with aversion. You have made her doubly hateful to me, Catherine. I cannot endure the thoughts of wedding her. You must free me from her."

"Free you from her, sire!" she exclaimed, feigning not to understand him. "How am I to do that?"

"One word from your sweet lips, Catherine, and even now at the eleventh hour, I will break off this detested match."

She made no reply, though the King looked eagerly at her as he spoke.

All her latent feelings of ambition were excited by this splendid offer, but they were held in check by the perils of her position.

"Your answer, Catherine?—your answer?" cried Henry.

Still she did not answer, and he again ardently urged her to speak.

"My liege, this is so unexpected—so much beyond all notions I have ever formed—that I am quite bewildered, and must entreat a few moments for consideration."

"No consideration is necessary," cried Henry.

"Ha! we are interrupted," he added, as footsteps were heard approaching. "By heaven, 'tis Cromwell! What brings him here?"

Why did Catherine look as appalled as if a spectre had suddenly risen before her? In Cromwell's attendant she had recognised Francis Dereham.

Fortunately, the King was too incensed to notice her terror.

VIII.

HOW CATHERINE DECLINED THE KING'S OFFER.

We must now see how Cromwell had obtained admittance.

On arriving at the mansion, he announced that he knew the King was there, and adding that he had business of importance with his Majesty, demanded to be led to him instantly.

Gervase, to whom he addressed himself, did not dare to refuse, though he knew that the Duchess of Norfolk would be highly offended by the intrusion.

Accordingly, he led the Earl and his attendant, who never quitted him, to the gardens, pointed out the King, and then left them to their devices, repairing forthwith to the Duchess, to acquaint her with the circumstance. Needless to say, she was excessively indignant, for she abhorred Cromwell, and looked upon him as the author of all the miseries inflicted upon the adherents of the old religion.

Lady Rochford was with her at the time, and when her ladyship discovered that the Earl of Essex was accompanied by Francis Dereham, she became seriously alarmed. That they came with some ill design to

Catherine, she did not doubt, and she set her wits to work to defeat it.

Meantime, Cromwell and his attendants had descended to the lower walk, where they found Henry engaged in amorous converse with Catherine.

A glance at the pair showed Cromwell how matters stood, and he secretly congratulated himself on the bold step he had taken.

"We are just in time," he remarked to his attendant.

Dereham's blood seemed on fire; but he repressed his rage. A terrible vengeance was in his power.

Braving the King's frown, Cromwell hastened towards him, and making a profound obeisance, besought a moment's speech, on a matter that concerned his Majesty nearly.

"Not now!" rejoined Henry, sternly. "See you not that I am engaged?"

"What I have to say cannot be deferred, sire," urged Cromwell.

"Speak, then!" cried Henry, impatiently.

"'Tis for your private ear, sire, and relates to her Highness the Princess of Cleves."

"Ah! by St. Anne, am I never to be at peace, but thou must eternally trouble me about the Princess of Cleves?" exclaimed Henry, furiously. "I desire to hear no more of her. Yet since thou hast come, thou shalt convey a message from me to her Highness."

"To what effect, sire?" asked Cromwell.

"Tell him what I have said to you, sweetheart," observed the King to Catherine. "He will know how to frame the message."

In his eagerness to catch Catherine's response, Dere-

ham made a slight step forward, and the movement attracted the King's notice.

"How now, fellow!" he exclaimed, sternly. "Who called thee? Who art thou?"

"The Lady Catherine Howard will tell your Majesty who I am," replied Dereham, boldly.

"He was formerly one of the Duchess's gentlemen, sire," she observed, glancing entreatingly at him.

"And he is now in my service," added Cromwell.

The look thrown by the Earl at Catherine as he spoke, convinced her that he was in possession of her secret.

Thus admonished, she had but one course to pursue.

"You will take back a loving message from his Majesty to the Princess," she said; "and tell her, in the tenderest phrases you can employ, that he will be with her at eventide, to give her an assurance of his regard."

"She has saved herself," muttered Cromwell.

"Ha! do you mock me?" cried Henry, angrily.

"No, sire," replied Catherine. "But you commanded me to be your mouth-piece. The message with which I have charged the Earl of Essex, in your Majesty's name, cannot fail to be agreeable to her Highness."

"Then that is your decision?" said Henry, in a low, reproachful tone. "You refuse the crown?"

"That is my decision, sire," she replied.

"You will repent it, Catherine! Mark me—you will repent it!" cried Henry. "I will not let him take that message."

"You must, sire—you must."

"Be it so!" cried Henry, haughtily. "Have you aught more to say to me, my lord?" he added to Cromwell.

"No, sire; my errand is accomplished. I will hasten with your message to the Princess."

"That is needless," said the King. "I will go to her myself. I have nothing to detain me here. Farewell, sweetheart!"

His abrupt departure was prevented by the appearance of the Duchess of Norfolk. Her Grace, who cast indignant looks at Cromwell and Dereham, was attended by Lady Rochford and Adrian Culpepper.

"Sire," she exclaimed, with a spirit hardly to be expected from her, and that seemed to restore something of her youth, "you never turn a deaf ear to the just complaints of your subjects. A gross affront has been offered me by the Earl of Essex. Not only has he intruded himself into my house under the pretext of important business with your Majesty, but he has brought with him an insolent varlet, who was ignominiously dismissed my service."

"There is reason in what you say, madam," said the King. "Knowing that his presence must be offensive, the Earl of Essex did wrong in coming here; but to bring with him a person who is objectionable to your Grace, looks like a studied insult."

"It must have been so intended, sire," cried the Duchess.

"Your Grace is mistaken," observed Cromwell, in a deprecatory tone. "I had no such design."

"Perhaps her Grace will explain why I was dismissed her service," observed Dereham.

"For thy presumption, thou insolent fellow!" cried the Duchess, scornfully. "Were not his Majesty here, thy master's livery should be no protection to thee. My

lacqueys should chastise thee, and drive thee forth, as thou wert driven forth before."

From the first, the King had taken a dislike to Dereham, and he laughed heartily at his discomfiture.

"Well said, Duchess!" cried his Majesty. "You are fit to be the ruler of a great house."

"I will lower her pride!" muttered Dereham.

A slight touch made him turn, and he encountered the fierce gaze of Adrian Culpepper.

"You may depart freely now," said the young man, in a deep whisper. "But I have not done with you."

"I shall be ready when you please," rejoined Dereham, in the same tone. "You know where to find me."

"Meddle not with him, Adrian," observed the Duchess, who had noticed what was passing; "he is unworthy of your sword."

But Adrian had other advice from Lady Rochford, who whispered that the insolent fellow must not escape punishment.

"He shall not," rejoined the young man.

The King did not cast another look at Catherine. Neither did he hold any further converse with Cromwell. He was angry with himself and all around him.

In this mood it was almost dangerous to approach him, and every one rejoiced at his departure.

Attended by Adrian Culpepper, he rode back to his palace at Greenwich.

IX.

THE RECEPTION OF ANNE OF CLEVES AT BLACKHEATH.

On that afternoon, proclamation was made by the Lord Mayor by sound of trump at various public places within the City of London, requiring all citizens, who loved their King, to repair to Greenwich on the morrow, to pay their devoir to the Princess Anne of Cleves, who would shortly become their Queen.

A similar proclamation was made by the heralds at Charing Cross, and before the gates of Whitehall.

All the chief nobility and others connected with the Court were likewise bidden to attend the ceremonial, for which magnificent preparations were made.

Meanwhile, the King, deeply chagrined by the incident at Lambeth, had ridden on to Dartford, where Anne was staying with her suite, patiently awaiting his pleasure, and passed a few hours in her company, returning to his palace at Greenwich at night. He was secretly as much dissatisfied with her as ever, but he endeavoured to conceal his dislike. Anne was not deceived by his manner. She dreaded the match more than he did, but she could not avoid it. The only feeling with which the King inspired her was terror.

No monarch was ever more fond of pageantry than Henry the Eighth, and if he tyrannized over his subjects, he indulged them with constant splendid shows.

The proclamation which he had caused to be issued was sufficient to summon all London to Greenwich.

Thousands sallied forth in their best apparel to salute their future Queen—thriving citizens in plain doublets and hose with flat caps on their heads, and their wives and daughters in close hoods and mufflers.

Luckily, the weather proved most auspicious. As the hour of ten was tolled from the ancient cathedral, amid the braying of trumpets, and the beating of kettle-drums, accompanied by the roar of ordnance from the Tower, a long and splendid cavalcade crossed London Bridge—the gates and towers of which were surmounted with banners.

The procession had started from York Place, and consisted of nobles, each with a long retinue of esquires and gentlemen, well mounted, and attired in velvet of various hues, and all having gold chains round the neck. The length of the cavalcade may be judged of, when we mention that those at its head were half-way to Greenwich before the rear had left the bridge.

But the bravest sight was on the river, which swarmed with gay and gilded barks, all bound, like the horsemen, for Greenwich.

Conspicuous among these for size and splendour was the Lord Mayor's state barge. Besides the arms of the City, it was garnished with banners, flags, streamers, pensils, and targets, some of which were painted and beaten with the King's arms, and some with the arms of the ducal house of Cleves. The barge was occupied by Sir William Hollys, at that time Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, the aldermen in their council, in their gowns and robes. The Lord Mayor had a robe of crimson velvet, and wore his chains, and the collar of S. S.

Scarcely less splendid were the barges of the twelve livery companies, each of which, besides pennons and

pensils innumerable, had a banner painted with the arms of its craft or mystery. All these barges were provided with minstrels, who kept up a perpetual din.

Our description, however, of this gorgeous fleet would be imperfect, without mention of the "Bachelors' Bark," a singularly-shaped barge, decked with cloth of gold. On board were many gallant youths, in rich apparel, with an equal number of fair damsels.

Attendant upon the "Bachelors' Bark" was a foist, from which large pieces of ordnance were constantly discharged. Thousands of wherries, laden with citizens and their wives, followed in the wake of the larger craft, or shot on ahead.

On the verge of Blackheath, and near the foot of Shooters' Hill, had been pitched a tent of cloth of gold, garnished with pennons and streamers, and hung with metal escutcheons emblazoned with the black cross of Cleves.

Behind this gorgeous tent, which was destined for the reception of the Princess, divers other tents and pavilions were grouped, but a large space in front was kept clear by halberdiers and mounted gentlemen pensioners.

By this time, the splendid cavalcade of nobles which we saw crossing London Bridge, had reached its destination, and was now drawn up in two long lines, extending from the Princess's tent to the old stone cross, then standing in the midst of the heath.

The majority of those who had come by water having now found their way to Blackheath, a vast concourse was assembled upon the plain.

On the summit of Shooters' Hill floated the royal standard, and around it several pieces of ordnance

were planted, near which stood the engineers, match in hand.

The slopes of the hill that looked upon Blackheath were covered with spectators, who enjoyed an admirable view of the scene. There was plenty to see, for splendidly-attired dames were arriving in litters or on palfreys, and their retinues were continually adding to the crowd. Mounted henchmen and arquebussiers were posted at various points, to keep order among the immense assemblage, which appeared to be momentarily increasing.

Just at noon, a shout arose from the crowd on Shooters' Hill, and was immediately taken up by the multitude below, and carried on to the most distant part of the heath.

Those on the eminence had descried the Princess coming along the road from Dartford. Then the artillery was fired, and the acclamations were redoubled, for the loud bray of the trumpets at the head of the cortège was heard. Two stately personages, riding side by side, and on richly caparisoned steeds, came first. These were the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk. Next came Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, with other bishops, lords, and knights. Immediately before the Princess rode the envoys of the Duke of Cleves, the Earl of Overstein, and the Grand Master Ostoden.

Anne was seated in a chariot, carved and gilt with the arms of Cleves, and covered with cloth of gold. This superb chariot was drawn by eight horses, trapped in black velvet, and ridden by pages of honour in velvet doublets. Behind it came Sir John Dudley, the Princess's master of the horse, leading her palfrey, trapped in rich tissue down to the ground. Four other chariots

followed, occupied by the ladies and gentlemen composing her suite.

Anne wore a surcoat of white cloth of tissue, with a mantle of the same material, furred with ermine. On her head was a golden circlet.

Passing through the ranks we have described, she alighted in the open space before her tent, where the chief personages who had escorted her were drawn up, and where she was received by the King's two nieces, the Lady Margaret Douglas, daughter of the Queen of Scots, and the Marchioness of Dorset, daughter of the Duke of Suffolk, who had married Henry's sister, Mary, by the Duchess of Richmond, and the Countesses of Rutland and Hertford.

Embracing them all, and thanking them heartily for their greeting, she entered her tent. The Princess's amiable deportment produced a very favourable impression upon the beholders, and reconciled them to her want of beauty.

"What is the King's fourth wife like?" demanded thousands, who could not obtain a glimpse of her.

Opinions differed; some asserting that she was very handsome—others that she was just the reverse. Many a rough jest was made on the occasion.

Meantime, another and far more brilliant cortège set forth from the Palace of Greenwich, and mounted the woody heights of the park.

First came the King's trumpeters, blowing loud fanfares. Next the officers of the Council, and next the gentlemen of the privy chamber—some arrayed in doublets of embroidered velvet, and others in doublets guarded with chains of gold. Then came the barons—

Sir William Hollys, the Lord Mayor, riding with the Lord Parr. Then followed the bishops, apparelled in black satin; then the earls; then Duke Philip of Bavaria, wearing the Toison d'Or. Next came the Ambassadors of France and Spain; and after them Cromwell, Earl of Essex, mounted on a richly-trapped horse, and wearing a gown of purple velvet. Round his neck was the collar of the Garter. By his side rode the Lord Chancellor. Chief among Cromwell's splendid retinue was Francis Dereham.

Next, at a certain distance, rode Henry.

Never had he been more magnificently attired—never did he look better. His milk-white courser was trapped in rich cloth of gold, traversed lattice-wise square, embroidered with gold of damask and pearled—the buckles and pendants being all of fine gold. His doublet was of purple velvet, embroidered with flat gold of damask, intermixed with fine gold lace. Over it he wore a surcoat, the sleeves and breast of which were cut and lined with cloth of gold, and fastened together by great buttons of diamonds, rubies, and orient pearls. The King's sword and girdle were thickly set with emeralds, and his bonnet was adorned with priceless gems. His collar, worn baldrick-wise, was of balass rubies and pearls. By his side walked ten footmen, in habiliments of goldsmith's work.

Some dozen yards behind the King rode the Lord Chamberlain, and after him came Sir Anthony Brown, Master of the Horse, leading the King's horse of estate by a long rein of gold. The noble animal, which seemed as proud as his royal master, was caparisoned in crimson velvet and satin, embroidered all over with gold, after an antique fashion.

At the head of the pages of honour rode Adrian Culpepper. His doublet was of rich tinsel and crimson velvet paled, and his courser was trapped in velvet of the same colour, embroidered with new devices and knots of gold.

All the pages were similarly equipped, and made a splendid show. Sir Anthony Wingfield, Captain of the Guard, with a hundred lances in glittering helm and corslet, all well mounted, brought up the rear of the cortège.

Henry's appearance on Blackheath was hailed with loud acclamations. Despot as he was, he was extraordinarily popular. Impressed by his strength of character, and dazzled by his magnificence, his subjects were blind to his many faults. Besides, he inspired them with a wholesome awe.

He haughtily surveyed the vast multitude surging around him on all sides, and shouting lustily; but took little notice of their demonstrations of loyalty and devotion.

However, he graciously saluted the nobles, as he rode slowly through their ranks towards the Princess's tent, in front of which all that portion of the cortège that had preceded him, was drawn up in a wide semicircle.

Here he dismounted, and had scarcely set foot on the ground, when Anne of Cleves, who had been made aware of his approach, issued forth from her tent, accompanied by his Majesty's nieces, the Lady Margaret Douglas and the Marchioness of Dorset.

All eyes were now upon the King, and it behoved him to play his part carefully. Moving with dignified step towards the Princess, he courteously doffed his

jewelled cap, and embraced her with well-affected warmth. During this part of the ceremonial, some of the fair lookers-on tittered, and several of the gravest of the beholders could scarcely repress a smile, his Majesty's dislike to his bride having now become generally known.

Perhaps not altogether unconscious of the absurdity of the situation, he retired into the tent with the Princess. Here Anne's ladies were assembled, and with them were some of the loveliest of the Court dames—all, it is needless to say, splendidly attired.

One of these instantly attracted Henry's attention. Amid that bevy of fair dames and damsels, she was the fairest. It was Catherine Howard, and near her was Lady Rochford.

Catherine's unlooked-for appearance at this juncture somewhat embarrassed the King. His passion revived, and he found it difficult to withdraw his eyes from her, though she sought to avoid his gaze.

A collation had been laid out in the midst of the tent. Henry led the Princess towards the table, and placing her in a raised fauteuil, seated himself beside her. He then called for a cup of wine, and praying her to drink first—according to the gallant usage of the time—emptied the cup.

Even at that moment his eyes did not quit Catherine, and it would almost seem that he drank to her.

Amongst the noble company present were the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk. Both were standing near the royal chair, and turning to the former, Henry observed, in a gracious tone, "I am glad to see the Lady Catherine Howard here, though I own I did not expect her."

"I felt that she ought not to be absent, my liege, on

an occasion like the present," replied the Duke, bowing; "and I therefore enjoined Lady Rochford to bring her from Lambeth."

"You did well," said Henry. "Have you seen the Lady Catherine?" he added, to the Princess.

"She has just been presented to me by the Duke of Norfolk," replied Anne; "and I have been perfectly astonished by her beauty. No one whom I have seen can compare with her."

"Your Highness is too good," said the Duke of Norfolk, bowing.

"Nay, I have not said a word too much in her praise," said Anne, noticing that the King looked pleased. "I have taken a great fancy to your beauteous niece, my Lord Duke; and I should like to have her always near me," she added, to Norfolk.

"As one of your maids of honour—ha!" exclaimed Henry.

"Precisely, sire," replied Anne.

"You could not have chosen better," said the King, approvingly.

"I am greatly honoured by your Highness's selection," said Norfolk; "but there is a slight difficulty in regard to my niece, of which his Majesty is aware. I must explain. Ever since the death of my brother, the Lord Edmund Howard, his daughter Catherine has been under the charge of my mother, the Duchess-Dowager—an austere dame, who passes her life in religious exercise, and would fain exclude her grand-daughter from the world. Is it not so, sire?"

"'Tis so, in truth," rejoined Henry. "But, by St. Mary! the obstinate old dame shall not have her own way."

"Pray bring your niece to me for a moment, that I may speak with her," said Anne.

Norfolk bowed, and did as he was bidden. Smiling most graciously, the Princess explained her wishes to Catherine; adding, "I know it will please my lord the King that you should attend upon me. I think you will love me, and I am sure I shall love you."

The varied emotions awakened in Catherine's bosom, prevented her from making a suitable reply to this amiable and condescending address. She felt that she should be acting a perfidious part towards the Princess in accepting the offer, yet how could she decline it?

Blushing and bewildered, she murmured her thanks, and was led back by the Duke of Norfolk.

Henry was delighted, and expressed his satisfaction. Whatever might be the Princess's defects, she was clearly not wanting in tact.

The foregoing incident had been witnessed by Adrian Culpepper, who was standing among the pages of honour, and caused him great uneasiness. He saw that the King was deeply enamoured of Catherine, and he well knew the risk she would incur if she were placed near the Queen. Anne's imprudence astounded him. She ought to have understood that she was selecting a dangerous rival.

Lady Rochford was likewise surprised by the Princess's excessive complaisance, but being more acute than Adrian, she attributed it to its real cause—desire to please the King, whose predilection for Catherine had been detected by the Princess.

"Evidently, she has no jealousy in her composition," thought Lady Rochford; "and having little confidence in herself, hopes to secure an influence over his Majesty

by means of a favourite. Vain precaution! She will be superseded before three months are over."

When Catherine was brought back by the Duke of Norfolk, the temptress congratulated her; adding, in a low tone, "So, you have gained your point; you are maid of honour to the Queen. That is the first step to the throne. Ere long, you will be Queen yourself."

X.

HOW THE ROYAL NUPTIALS WERE SOLEMNIZED AT GREENWICH PALACE.

SHORTLY afterwards, the royal pair quitted the tent, and proceeded to Greenwich Palace.

Anne had mounted her palfrey, and rode by the King's side. Her large Amazonian figure was seen to great advantage on horseback, and the populace began to think she was a very fitting consort for their burly sovereign.

All was now movement towards the park, and as soon as the grand cortège had passed through the gates, the public was permitted to enter.

It was a magnificent sight to see the long, glittering cavalcade descend the hill, and shape its course through the stately avenue of elms on to the palace, and the spectacle was enjoyed by the thousands who covered the woody slopes.

From this position, as from Shooters' Hill, the whole scene could be distinguished, and it was one calculated to make a lasting impression on the beholders.

The splendour and variety of the costumes of the nobles and their followers—the accountrements of the guard—the costly habiliments of the henchmen—the richly-caparisoned horses—the chariots, some covered with cloth of gold, others with velvet—the horse-litters, in which sat high-born damsels—all combined to make a most striking picture. At the same time, the ear was filled with lively strains.

But the view of the multitude collected upon the heights was not limited to the park, or to the precincts of the palace. It embraced the river—nay, it extended to London itself, which could be discerned in the distance. The lofty spire of the cathedral, shooting up into the sunny air, was plainly distinguishable. The Tower, and the tall edifices on London Bridge, could likewise be descried.

Nearer, and almost opposite the palace, were moored the gorgeous City barges, which we have previously described. The minstrels belonging to these barges were now playing and singing joyously, while shoals of smaller craft were shooting backwards and forwards in front of the terrace—those within them shouting lustily.

A great peal of ordnance was shot from the Tower of Greenwich as the King and the Princess of Cleves entered the outer court of the palace.

Henry dismounted first, and assisting the Princess to alight, conducted her to the great hall, where they separated—each to prepare for the ceremonial that was to unite them,—alas, not indissolubly!

How the King passed that interval it boots not to inquire. About two hours later, he came forth from his

closet into the great gallery, where all his principal nobles were assembled.

He had entirely changed his costume, and was now arrayed in a doublet of crimson satin, embroidered with gold, and tied with great diamonds. His gown was of cloth of gold, raised with great flowers of silver, and furred with black genets. Round his neck he wore a diamond collar.

Preceded by Cromwell, who had been recently appointed Lord Chamberlain, he marched on to meet his bride.

At the same moment that the King had issued from his closet, the Princess appeared at the opposite end of the grand gallery. She walked between the Earl of Overstein and the Grand Master Ostoden.

She was apparelled for the ceremony in a gown of rich cloth of gold, set full of flowers of great orient pearl. Her stomacher and girdle were adorned with jewels of inestimable value. On her brow rested a coronal of gold, entwined with small branches of rosemary—this herb of grace being then used at marriage ceremonials, as at funerals. Her long yellow tresses were unbound, and flowed over her shoulders.

Behind her came her ladies and the principal personages composing her suite. Her manner was calm and dignified; no trace of emotion was visible in her countenance.

Midway in the gallery stood Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was waiting to perform the marriage ceremony. As the Princess approached, she made three profound obeisances to the King.

Anne was given away by the Earl of Overstein, as

representative of her brother, the Duke of Cleves. On the wedding-ring was this inscription—

"God send me well to keep."

Cromwell, who stood near the King, witnessed the ceremony with inexpressible satisfaction. The success of his scheme was now complete.

After the celebration of the marriage, the royal pair went hand in hand to the King's closet, where they heard mass, and offered their tapers. From this it will be seen, that although the Reformed religion had made considerable progress, certain Romish rites were still practised. Wine and spices were then offered them by the pages of honour.

The remainder of the day was spent in festivity. A grand banquet was followed by a masque and revel.

XI.

THE DUKE OF NORFOLK AND THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER.

Catherine Howard, though urged to do so by Lady Rochford, did not accompany the rest of the Court dames to Greenwich, but returned with her confidante in the Duke of Norfolk's barge to Lambeth.

They had not proceeded far up the river, which was thronged with wherries pursuing the same course as themselves, when they were overtaken by a splendid bark, rowed by eight oarsmen in Cromwell's livery. In it sat Francis Dereham, and with him was the Morisco.

Neither Catherine's scornful glances, nor Lady Rochford's angry and menacing looks, caused him to depart. Hovering around the barge, and keeping his eye fixed on Catherine as a falcon might watch a dove, he fascinated and terrified her. Nor did he relieve her of his hateful presence till they reached London Bridge.

"Thank heaven, he is gone!" she exclaimed. "Oh, that I were completely freed from him! He will destroy all my future!"

"He shall not live to destroy it!" rejoined Lady Rochford. "Since he has secured Cromwell's protection, he deems himself safe; but he shall not trouble you long."

Catherine could not be so easily reassured. All her golden dreams of the morning—all the ambitious thoughts roused within her breast by the King's too plainly-expressed admiration—had been rudely dispelled. She thought only of the ties that bound her to Dereham, and of the extreme likelihood that he would carry his audacity so far as to claim her.

Quite upset by these painful reflections, she arrived, exhausted and unhappy, at Lambeth, and sought instant refuge in her own chamber. When alone, she shed abundance of tears.

Next morning she had somewhat recovered her spirits. The old Duchess and Father Anselm received her with countenances of mingled sorrow and anger. They had already learnt from Lady Rochford that she had been appointed one of the maids of honour to the new Queen.

"You have profited little by the lessons I have taught you, Catherine," said the Duchess, in a severe tone. "No sooner are snares spread, than you fall into them.

I believed you proof against temptation, but I find, to my sorrow, that you have small power of resistance."

"Some allowance must be made for the Lady Catherine's youth, madam," said Father Anselm. "'Tis greatly to be lamented that the noble Duke, your son, should have sent for her yesterday, knowing, as he does, how carefully you have watched over her, and how anxiously you have shielded her from all possible contact with ill. I cannot but marvel that he should take a step, the pernicious consequences of which might have been predicted —were predicted, indeed, by your Grace. Alas! it is easier to take a false step than to retrace it! The mischief is done, and cannot be repaired."

Catherine made no reply, and the Duchess renewed the attack.

"I object to your being at Court, as you know, Catherine," she said. "I had another and a better destiny for you. But I never thought it would come to this; I never deemed that my grand-daughter, brought up in the old and true faith, and taught to abominate heresy, would consent to serve a Lutheran Queen. Had it been the pious Catherine of Arragon, the case would have been very different; but from this heretical woman all the old nobility are bound to keep away. I hold it a disgrace to serve her."

"I share your sentiments, madam," said Father Anselm. "I cannot bear the thought that the Lady Catherine should swell her train."

"She shall not, holy father—she shall not!" cried the Duchess. "I will not allow her to go!"

"I am quite content, dear grandam," said Catherine, in a tone of resignation. "Whatever you enjoin, I will obey."

The foregoing discussion took place in the Duchess's private closet, and it was scarcely concluded when Gervase announced his Grace the Duke of Norfolk and the Lord Bishop of Winchester.

The old Duchess received her son coldly, for she was displeased with him; but she was unusually deferential to the Bishop of Winchester, whom she not improperly regarded as the head of the Romish party.

Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, was a man of unquestionable talent, haughty, intolerant, fierce of temper, ever ready to assail his adversaries, who were numerous, or to defend his friends, who were not now so numerous. Bold, unscrupulous, crafty, Gardiner thought, with Ignatius Loyola, and many others, whether Jesuits or not, that the end justifies the means. Though he adhered firmly to the old religion, he maintained the King's favour. Henry had too great a respect for his learning and ability to deprive him of his see, though he remained abroad for two years in honourable exile, and had but recently returned.

Gardiner had an extremely forbidding countenance, though it was replete with intellectual power. He had a large aquiline nose, and piercing black eyes, shaded by thick black brows, that gave him a resemblance to a bird of prey.

The noble figure and handsome features of the Duke of Norfolk offered a striking contrast to the fierce and crafty countenance of the subtle prelate.

Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, and one of the most distinguished men of his age, was then in his sixty-sixth year; but he looked as active and energetic as when, some fifteen years earlier, he had entered Scotland at the head of the English army, and had besieged

and taken Jedworth Castle. He was then the best military leader in England, and the King owed much to his skill and successes.

Early in life he had commanded the front guard at Flodden, and since then he had obtained numerous victories. As Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, he defeated O'Neale at the head of a large force. Sent on an expedition into France, he landed in Brittany, took Morlaix, penetrated into Picardy, and advanced within seven leagues of Paris. In his brilliant career he rose to the highest dignities, being successively appointed Lord Treasurer and Earl Marshal of England. From Henry he received the Order of the Garter, and from Francis the First the collar of St. Michael. Only three years before, he had crushed the formidable rebellion in the North, known as the "Pilgrimage of Grace."

A profound politician as well as a skilful leader, the Duke of Norfolk was also an adroit courtier, and had hitherto, through all changes, contrived to maintain his influence over the wayward King. He deserted Wolsey, who had aided his rise, and made him Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. He sat in judgment upon his niece, Anne Boleyn,—and we shall see how he comported himself towards another niece, Catherine Howard. But his zeal for the Roman Catholic religion was unabated, and he never swerved from his faith. Had he been allowed to do so, he would have persecuted the Reformers unrelentingly. Cranmer and Cromwell were especial objects of his hate, and he hoped to destroy them both. He had made many vain attempts to inflame Henry's mind against Cranmer. Of Cromwell's speedy overthrow he felt assured.

The Duke of Norfolk, who had passed a large por-

tion of his life in camps, had a martial air and deportment. His expression was haughty and commanding. He was tall of stature and strongly built, though he had not the gigantic frame or broad shoulders of the King. His beard was grizzled, and his gray hair clipped close to the head. His doublet and hose were of scarlet velvet, and his surcoat of the same material, but of a darker hue. His buskins were likewise of velvet, crossed by bands and adorned with jewels. He wore a two-handed sword, and a poniard in a gilt sheath dangled above his right hip.

Such was the great Duke of Norfolk.

Gardiner was enveloped in a close cassock of black stuff, and from his surcingle hung a mass-book.

After saluting her uncle and the Bishop of Winchester, Catherine Howard was about to retire, but the Duke detained her for a moment, while he whispered in her ear, "Fear nothing. We will arrange all satisfactorily with the Duchess."

Gardiner gave her a like word of encouragement, and she then quitted the cabinet with Father Anselm.

"You find me in a state of great distress, my lord," said the old Duchess to Gardiner. "All my plans in regard to my grand-daughter have been disarranged. She is to be taken from me, and placed under this heretical Princess. I am sure you will sympathise with me in my misfortune."

"When you understand the matter more clearly, madam, you will not view it as a misfortune," rejoined Gardiner.

"Do you not blame the Duke for sending for her?" she cried.

"On the contrary, madam, I think his Grace acted

most judiciously, and the wisdom of the step has been proved by the result. Nay, if I must speak truth, I counselled the line of conduct he has adopted; so, if blame there be, it must rest on my shoulders. Our object has been to serve the cause of our religion, and, by so doing, inflict a heavy blow on its adversaries."

"I approve of the object, but do not see how it is to be accomplished by the course pursued," observed the Duchess, gravely.

"Look you, madam," cried the Duke; "a great opportunity has occurred, and we should be wanting to ourselves and our cause if we allowed it to slip. The King is disgusted with the consort provided for him by Cromwell, and would fain have sent her back; but he has been forced into the match, with what reluctance you will understand when I tell you that he has already intimated that he will divorce her."

"Another divorce!" exclaimed the Duchess, in surprise.

"Ay, another divorce!" returned Gardiner—"and, after the divorce, another bride. And the bride will be your grand-daughter, Catherine Howard."

The Duchess lifted up her hands in amazement.

"Such is the actual order of events, madam," observed Gardiner, with decision. "The Lady Catherine has captivated his Majesty, that is certain. 'Twill be her own fault if she be not Queen."

"That would reconcile me to her loss," said the Duchess.

"Why, so it ought, madam—so it ought; to say nothing of the services she would render our cause," observed Gardiner.

"If Catherine is Queen—as she shall be," cried Nor-

folk, "her influence over Henry will enable us to crush the Reformers, and re-establish the old doctrines. Cromwell calculated upon Anne of Cleves to extend the progress of heresy, and consolidate his own power; and if Anne's charms had answered his description, he would, doubtless, have succeeded. As it is, his disgrace is inevitable."

"His highest offices will then fall to our share," said Gardiner. "Tunstal, Bishop of Durham, will become Vicar-General; and Clarke, Bishop of Bath, will be Lord Privy Seal. All Cromwell's creatures will fall with him. His Majesty has already testified his displeasure with Doctor Barnes, who was secretly employed to negotiate the marriage with the Duke of Cleves. At Paul's Cross, in my last sermon, I sharply rebuked those preachers who have inculcated the Lutheran tenet of justification by faith, without works."

"I heard of that excellent sermon, my lord," observed the Duchess.

"Confident in the Vicar-General's protection," pursued the Bishop, "Barnes assailed me and the Romish priesthood with such foul abuse and coarse buffoonery, that the King indignantly committed him to the Tower. Cromwell will feel the blow, for it was levelled against him. Let him beware! Heaven's vengeance will not long be delayed. His evil counsel has stirred the King to do great wrong. He is the contriver of that accursed work, the dissolution of the monasteries; and, as a reward, has obtained the grant of thirty manors, once the property of as many religious houses. Can such iniquity prosper? His ill-gotten wealth shall be taken from him, and he shall perish. Let Cranmer, also, take heed. There are pitfalls in his path, into which he may stumble. While

Latimer, Thaxton, and all the rest of our foes shall be driven forth."

"May I live to see that day!" ejaculated the Duchess.

"You shall see it, madam," said the Duke. "Let but Catherine become Queen, and all the rest will follow. Through her we shall be able to govern the King. Anne Boleyn kindled the Reform—Catherine Howard will extinguish the mischievous fire. Anne of Cleves has influence neither for good nor evil. She cannot serve Cromwell, if she would. She has neither beauty, grace, nor wit—nothing to captivate the King."

"'Tis most fortunate that your grand-daughter has been so well brought up, madam," observed Gardiner. "In all respects, she is admirably fitted for the part she has to play. She has youth and marvellous beauty—the latter being indispensable. Then she has accomplishments."

"She has a sweet voice, my lord," said the Duchess; "but she sings no light songs, and she plays well on the virginals. But I doubt if she can dance."

"Nay, I have seen her dance, and right merrily, too," cried the Duke, laughing. "She has every requisite to please the King, and retain his affections. But she has one especial point in her favour, that must weigh with him—perfect purity, assured by the secluded life she has led with you. No breath of scandal can touch her. Anne Boleyn's guilty conduct has made the King naturally suspicious. But he can have no distrust in this case. Catherine is innocence itself."

"Her modest looks, and gentle, maidenly deportment, proclaim her goodness," said Gardiner.

"Young damsels cannot be too carefully guarded," said the Duchess. "Anne Boleyn—I will not own her

as my grand-daughter—learnt all the arts of coquetry and dissimulation in the gay Court of France. Catherine has been taught better—that is all I have to say."

"You deserve the utmost credit, madam," said Gardiner. "And you will now be well repaid for all the care you have bestowed upon her."

The Duchess was not without secret misgivings, for her thoughts reverted to Francis Dereham, whose reappearance at this juncture, as one of Cromwell's gentlemen, caused her some uneasiness. She had never acquainted the Duke, her son, with the reason of Dereham's dismissal, and she revolved well in herself whether she should now disclose the matter to him, and to the Bishop of Winchester.

Deeply did she afterwards regret that she hesitated to do so. A word to the Duke would have enabled him to get rid of the enemy.

XII.

THE CONFLICT.

MEANTIME, Catherine Howard had strolled forth into the garden. She wished to be alone, in order to collect her thoughts. But such was her mental confusion, that the task was difficult.

One thing was certain. She must go to Court. However opposed her grandmother might be to the plan, she must yield to the advice of the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester. She should then see the King

continually. How she recalled all the tender words he had breathed to her during their walk together along the terrace! How incredible it seemed that he should have offered her his hand! Yet more incredible that she should have refused him. But his displeasure was gone, and his passion was in nowise abated, as his amorous glances in the tent had convinced her. Visions of splendour again rose before her.

While indulging these dreams, she had insensibly wandered towards that part of the garden where her nocturnal meetings with Dereham had taken place. His dark visage, however, did not intrude upon her meditations. When not thinking of the King, she thought of Adrian Culpepper.

Suddenly, she heard Adrian's voice, and turning, beheld him hastening towards her.

How well he looked in his superb riding-dress! But there were traces of sadness on his handsome countenance.

"Oh, I am glad I have found you, Catherine," he cried, as he came up. "I have speeded from Greenwich, as fast as my horse could bear me, to say a few words to you. I know that the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester are here, and I guess their errand. But do not let them induce you, by any representations they may make, to quit this secure retreat. Hear the truth from me. The Duke of Norfolk has discovered the King's predilection for you, and designs to turn it to his purpose. 'Tis to warn you of your danger that I came hither."

"You alarm yourself needlessly, Adrian. You may have perfect reliance on my discretion. Whatever

temptations I may be exposed to, I shall know how to resist them."

"But you have not consented?" he cried.

"No, I have not expressly consented, but I do not see how I can refuse."

"If you love me as you have told me you do, and as I believe you do, you *will* refuse."

"Impossible, Adrian. You ask more than I am able to perform. I am not my own mistress. If the Duke, my uncle, and the Duchess, my grandmother, agree that it is right for me to go to Court, I cannot disobey."

"Take care!" he cried, almost in a tone of menace. "I am jealous. I shall be always near you. Not a word —not a look will escape me."

And his looks grew sombre.

"Adrian, you distrust me."

"No, I do not distrust you, Catherine. But I distrust the Duke of Norfolk, for I know his aim, and what he aspires to, and I fear the King."

"Fear nothing. I will always be true to you."

"Your faith will be severely tried, Catherine, and you will need more firmness than you now display. Your position will be fraught with extreme peril, and you will have mischievous advisers. Do not listen to them. The King is enamoured of you. He is the slave of his passions. Do you not perceive your danger? Can you pass safely through such an ordeal?"

"I hope so," she replied, in a low tone.

While thus conversing, they had entered the enclosure in the midst of which stood the little rustic temple. Catherine started on finding herself in the ill-omened spot, and would have retreated, but he detained her.

"Oh, I am wretched!" he cried. "But it is in your power to alleviate my anguish."

"How?" she inquired.

"Plight yourself solemnly to me! Swear by all your hopes of heaven that you will be mine—mine only!"

Catherine trembled, and made no reply.

"Ha! do you hesitate?" he cried.

Before she could answer, a deep, stern voice called out, "Forbear!"

Next moment, Francis Dereham issued from the bosquet, followed by his sable attendant, Mourzouk.

"Forbear!" he repeated, as he strode into the enclosure, and faced them.

Catherine with difficulty repressed a cry, and clung to Adrian for protection, gazing with terror at the audacious intruder.

The latter seemed to enjoy the dismay he had caused, and an almost diabolical grin played upon the countenance of the African.

"You here again!" cried Adrian, regarding Dereham fiercely. "You shall repent this insolent interruption."

"The Lady Catherine may thank me," rejoined Dereham. "It has saved her from a crime."

"From a crime?"

"Ay! had I not appeared at the nick of time, she would have forsworn herself. That vow has been pronounced before, and on the self-same spot."

Adrian was confounded.

"Is this true?" he muttered.

"He lies!" exclaimed Catherine, who had recovered herself. "He is a false knave, and unworthy of all credit. He has come here to gratify his malice."

"I came here to speak with you," rejoined Dereham,

"and I meant not to depart without an interview. You know my errand. I am not to be terrified with threats. Those who interfere with me will have to settle with the Earl of Essex, whom I serve."

"Were you the servant of the devil, instead of the Earl of Essex, I would cut your throat for your insolence," cried Adrian.

And plucking forth his rapier, he prepared to attack Dereham, who instantly put himself on guard.

Greatly alarmed, Catherine started off towards the house to procure assistance; but she had not gone far, when the clash of steel increased her terror, and she sank on a bench in a half-fainting state.

The combat was of short duration. Adrian felt the might of twenty men in his arm. His adversary, though strong and skilful, could not resist his furious attack.

Dereham fought with sword and dagger, and had thus an advantage; but it availed him nothing. Adrian struck his rapier from his hold; and seizing his left hand with an iron grasp, prevented him from using his dagger, while at the same time he placed the point of his own sword at his throat.

"Retract the foul lie you have uttered, or you are a dead man!" he cried.

While shortening his blade to strike, he received a sudden blow, which, if it had taken full effect, must have proved mortal.

Mourzouk had sprung upon him with a bound like that of a tiger, and stabbed him with his yataghan.

The wounded man instantly fell, bathed in blood. Mourzouk expected thanks from his master, but was loaded with reproaches.

But this was no time for inaction. Lifting the ap-

parently inanimate body from the ground, they bore it into the little temple.

While they were thus employed, Dereham made some slight examination of the wound, and satisfied himself that it was not so serious as he had at first supposed.

"He will live," he thought. "Shall I help him, or let him perish?"

His better nature triumphed. Propping up the wounded man's head, he stanched the flow of blood.

But he did nothing more—Mourzouk thought he had done too much. Leaving him to take his chance of recovery, they hurried off to their boat, which was moored to the bank of the river.

XIII.

HOW ADRIAN WAS TENDED BY OLD GERVASE.

MEANWHILE, Catherine had regained sensibility, but had not quitted the bench.

She was listening intently for any sounds of strife; but none were likely to reach her, for the conflict was over, when Lady Rochford and old Gervase were seen approaching, and she rose to meet them.

Lady Rochford hastily explained that the Duke of Norfolk was inquiring for her, and begged her to go to him without delay. But Catherine whispered a few words in the other's ear that produced a startling effect.

"What you tell me is most strange," said Lady

Rochford. "I hope Adrian has killed him. There will be no peace for you while that man lives. But go to the Duke of Norfolk, or all will be discovered. Lose no time, and compose yourself. I will take Gervase with me, and ascertain what has happened. Fly!"

And as Catherine hastened to the house, Lady Rochford bade Gervase follow her.

Deeming it necessary to prepare the usher, she remarked to him that there had been a duel.

"A duel!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "Between whom?"

"Between Master Adrian Culpepper and Francis Dereham. But the matter must be kept secret from the Duchess."

"It shall be, as far as I am concerned," replied the usher. "But I hope no harm has befallen Master Adrian."

"I hope not. But we shall see in a moment."

And she quickened her pace.

The enclosure was vacant, and Lady Rochford at first thought the combatants had departed, but old Gervase called her attention to a small pool of blood on the ground.

"Horror!" she exclaimed. "One of them has fallen. Pray heaven it may prove to be Dereham!"

Guided by the big drops of blood on the turf leading to the rustic temple, they hurried thither.

The door was partly open. What a spectacle met their gaze! Adrian was lying on the floor, as he had been left, his velvet doublet dyed with blood.

Supposing him to be dead, Lady Rochford uttered a cry, and this caused him to open his eyes. She saw that he desired to raise himself, and slightly lifted his head.

"Saint Dominick must have prompted me to put this phial in my pouch," cried Gervase. "'Tis a wondrous elixir, confected by Doctor Butts, the King's own physician."

He knelt down by the side of the wounded man, and placed the phial to his lips.

Not without difficulty did Adrian swallow a few drops, but their effect was magical. The colour returned to his cheeks.

"I will answer for his recovery now," cried Gervase.

"Where is Catherine?" demanded Adrian, faintly.

Lady Rochford placed her finger on her lips to impose silence, but he looked at her so earnestly, that she was obliged to inform him.

"Catherine is with the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester," she said.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with an expression of anguish.

"Do not disturb yourself thus," she cried. "All will be well. You will live to revenge yourself on that villain Dereham."

"I had him in my power," rejoined Adrian; "and but for the infidel dog he brought with him, and who dealt me this treacherous blow, I should have slain him."

"I must positively forbid further speech, sir," said Gervase. "I must pray your ladyship to send Paulet to me forthwith. Tell him what has happened. You may confide in him as in me. Bid him bring bandages, a flask of Gaillac, and some aqua vitæ. As soon as it can be done with safety, we will transport Master Adrian privily to the house. Meantime, I will tend him carefully."

"If I leave you, 'tis to send you aid," said Lady Rochford to the wounded man.

"Implore Catherine not to neglect my counsel," he murmured.

Bidding him rest easy, and relinquishing her post to Gervase, she quitted the temple. Adrian followed her with anxious gaze.

On returning to the mansion, Lady Rochford learnt, to her great satisfaction, that the Duke of Norfolk and Gardiner were just taking their departure.

With a wave of the hand from the portal, she bade them adieu, and then seeking out Paulet, despatched him on his errand.

Catherine was all anxiety to learn what had happened, but Lady Rochford deemed it prudent to keep the precise truth from her; and therefore told her Adrian had been slightly hurt; and finding even this alarmed her, she added, carelessly, "'Tis a mere trifle. My chief regret is that he has not delivered you from Dereham. But what of the Duke of Norfolk? To judge from his Grace's looks at parting, and those of the Bishop of Winchester, their object has been satisfactorily accomplished. I hope so."

"Their arguments have prevailed with the Duchess," replied Catherine. "I never dreamed she would yield, but she has now quite changed her mind, and appears to think it most desirable that I should become one of the new Queen's maids of honour."

"Nothing could be better," cried Lady Rochford, joyfully.

"To-morrow, my uncle, the Duke, will conduct me in his barge to Greenwich Palace. You will go with me, Isabel, for you are appointed one of the Queen's ladies."

"I rejoice to hear it. I shall be always near to advise you."

"Three days hence, Bishop Gardiner, who interests himself so much about me, will give a grand banquet to the King at Winchester House."

"At which you will, of course, be present, Catherine," observed Lady Rochford.

"You will be there as well, Isabel."

"The Bishop is a good friend," said Lady Rochford, with a smile. "Only follow my counsel, and all I have predicted will come to pass. You have a glorious prospect before you."

"But poor Adrian! You forget him."

"No, I do not forget him. But he must not be allowed to stand in your way. You would not compare him with the King!"

A momentary feeling of exultation crossed Catherine's breast, but it soon gave place to anxiety.

"Dereham yet lives to blight me," she cried, despondingly.

XIV.

THE BANQUET AT WINCHESTER HOUSE.

Not far from the beautiful Gothic pile of St. Saviour's Church stood the town palace of the Bishops of Winchester, who were lords of the manor in Southwark.

In point of size, Winchester House was fully equal to the archiepiscopal palace at Lambeth, and it was of even greater antiquity, having been built early in the twelfth century. It possessed a vast number of apartments, two long corridors, a fine old oak staircase, a magnificent hall lighted with great bay windows, which were filled with stained glass of the richest hues, and a chapel of remarkable beauty.

The palace was approached from the river by private stairs, which led to a lofty embattled gateway. Stately gardens surrounded the edifice, and adjoining it was a park full of old timber.

Gardiner lived in sumptuous style. Since Wolsey's downfall, no prelate had ventured to assume such state. He had a numerous band of pages, all of whom were sons of Roman Catholic noblemen and gentlemen of ancient lineage, and these contributed largely to his expenditure.

Winchester House was the rendezvous of the chiefs of the Romish party, and secret consultations were held there at every critical juncture. The step taken by the Duke of Norfolk in regard to his niece, Catherine

Howard, was the result of a long debate with the plotting prelate.

In furtherance of the scheme, Gardiner had resolved to give a grand banquet to the King and his new consort, and Henry readily accepted the invitation, for he liked the Bishop's entertainments.

The principal personages of the Court were invited —the Duke of Bavaria, who was then a suitor for the hand of the Princess Mary; the Earl of Overstein, and the Grand Master Ostoden; the Comte de Marillac, ambassador to Francis the First; and M. de Chapuys, the Emperor's ambassador.

Cromwell himself, distasteful as he was to the Bishop, could not be omitted without offence to the King. The Lord Chancellor Audeley—another of Gardiner's opponents, and the avowed enemy of Norfolk—with many others, equally objectionable, had to be tolerated for the occasion.

All the Court dames were bidden to the feast—the Princess Mary, the King's two nieces, the Duchess of Richmond, the Countesses of Rutland and Hertford, and Lady Rochford.

Of course, the Queen brought her maids of honour with her, and among the number was the lovely Catherine Howard.

On stepping from their barges on a carpet of velvet, the illustrious guests passed through lines of henchmen, bearing gilt pole-axes, into the palace, where the prelate, surrounded by his noble pages, all splendidly apparelled, was ready to receive them.

No one could play the host better than Gardiner; no one, when he chose, had a more courteous manner.

Their Majesties came last, and on their arrival,

chambers and guns were discharged from the summit of the gate-tower, and flourishes of trumpets announced their entrance into the great banqueting-hall, which, being lighted up by numberless wax torches, stuck in huge sconces, hung with arras, and adorned with open cupboards of plate, presented a dazzling sight; the gorgeous costumes of the company contributing in no slight degree to the splendour of the spectacle. Nothing could be seen but cloths of gold and silver, rich tissues and embroidered velvets; and there was a perfect blaze of jewellery.

At no time was magnificence of attire carried to such a pitch as during the reign of Henry the Eighth. Chains of gold, and girdles decked with gems, were worn by all persons of rank. Imagine the brilliant effect of the display.

It was the custom then, with nobles and knights, to wear their jewelled caps during dinner; but of course all heads were bared on the entrance of their Majesties into the banqueting-chamber, and were not covered again till the royal pair were seated beneath the cloth of estate. Then all the company sat down.

The tables were spread with perfumed napery, and plentifully garnished with magnificent silver vessels. Numerous officers, pages, cup-bearers, and grooms were in attendance. Two hundred dishes of "costly devises and subtilities" were served at the banquet.

Some of these dishes were of prodigious size, and would astonish an alderman of our day. A royal sturgeon, baked, was served entire. A baron of beef, and other huge joints, were carved on a side-table. The wines, as well as the viands, were admirable. Rhenish and Muscadine, Gaillac, Gascoigne, and Osey were dis-

pensed in flowing cups. Minstrels enlivened the company with their strains from the gallery.

Henry was well pleased with the banquet, and signified his satisfaction, in his bluff style, to Gardiner, who stood behind his chair.

The King, as we have already intimated, was a huge feeder, but he disliked to see women eat, and the Queen's hearty appetite disgusted him. Noticing this, Gardiner was malicious enough to recommend a variety of dishes to her attention, and she partook of all, in spite of Henry's frowns.

Cromwell, who, in his quality of Lord Chamberlain, waited upon the King, with the Duke of Norfolk, during the repast, would fain have given her a hint, if he had dared. It was reserved to Will Sommers, who was standing near the Bishop, behind the royal chair, to caution her.

"My lord," quoth the buffoon to Gardiner, "you will give her Majesty a surfeit, if you persuade her to eat more."

"Go to, thou saucy knave," rejoined the Bishop. "Her Highness has fared indifferently. I pray you, madam, to taste this hypocras jelly. You will find it delicious."

"Nay, I cannot resist that," returned the Queen.

"A marchpane is a necessary accompaniment."

Anne took the marchpane as well.

Cromwell was in despair, for he saw that the King's disgust was increased.

Catherine Howard had been designedly placed at the upper part of the table. She was seated between the Comte de Marillac and M. de Chapuys, who vied with each other in attention to the lovely maid of honour.

With the quickness of perception proper to sharp-witted ambassadors, they had discovered that the King was enamoured of her, and were eager to pay court to the rising favourite. Both were men of refined and agreeable manner, and Catherine could not but be delighted with their conversation—though there might be a slight tinge of gallantry about it, and their compliments were somewhat extravagant.

Henry kept his eyes upon her, and while enraptured with her charms, which were never seen to greater advantage, greatly admired her manner. He could not help talking about her to the Duke of Norfolk.

"How well your niece looks to-night, my lord," he said. "Her deportment is charming. No one would imagine she had led a secluded life. I am told she sings delightfully."

"'Tis not for me to praise her," replied the Duke. "Your Majesty must hear her, and judge. She plays upon the cittern, and with some skill and taste."

"The Lady Catherine sings and plays enchantingly," observed Gardiner.

"Have you a cittern?" said the King. "But I need not ask. Everything is to be found at Winchester House."

"I descry one in the minstrel's gallery," remarked Will Sommers.

"Thou hast a quick eye as well as a ready wit, knave," said the Bishop, laughing. "Luckily, sire, I can provide a cittern."

"Good!" cried Henry. "Abridge the remainder of the banquet. 'Tis too long."

"Have some consideration for the Queen, gossip Harry," whispered Will Sommers. "Her Highness has not yet half done."

Privileged as he was, the jester would not have ventured upon this remark, if he had not felt sure it would be well received.

Shortly afterwards, rose-water in a silver ewer was presented by the Duke of Norfolk to the King, while Cromwell offered the napkin; and having thus refreshed himself, Henry arose.

The Queen rose at the same moment, and their Majesties were ceremoniously conducted to the Bishop's presence-chamber, which had been fitted up as a ball-room, and was brilliantly illuminated by large wax torches, that diffused pleasant odours as they burnt.

Throne-like chairs, with a cloth of estate above them, embroidered in gold with the royal arms, were set for the King and Queen. On either side were other seats reserved for the Princess Mary, the Lady Margaret Douglas, and the Marchioness of Dorset. The Queen's ladies and the maids of honour stood around, and made a splendid show.

The Duke of Bavaria, who was very richly dressed and wore the Toison d'Or, was paying assiduous court to the Princess Mary. The two ambassadors were hovering about the Lady Catherine Howard; and the Earl of Overstein and the Grand Master Ostoden were conversing with Cromwell and Audeley.

Gardiner and Norfolk were standing at the foot of the velvet-covered estrade on which the royal seats were placed; while Will Sommers was reclining on the lowest step.

Already, the vast chamber was filled with the company from the banqueting hall, and the minstrels commenced playing an overture to a masque.

A masque was then performed, the subject being

taken—out of compliment to the Queen—from a romantic legend connected with the ancient Castle of Cleves, called Schwanenberg, wherein Anne was born.

The legend ran thus:—A very handsome young knight, drawn in a fairy bark by a swan, and attended by a troop of water-nymphs, appeared at the Castle of Cleves, and so charmed the Duchess who then dwelt there, by his grace and good looks, that she wedded him.

This masque, which afforded good scope for strange and picturesque dresses, was capitally performed. Nothing could be more perfect than the swan; the magic car glittered with tinsel; the nymphs of the Lurley, with their long streaming yellow hair, woven with water-lilies, danced delightfully; and the Knight and the Duchess were both very handsome.

The Queen was enchanted, and warmly thanked Gardiner for the gratification he had afforded her. The Earl of Overstein and Ostoden were also highly delighted and expressed their admiration.

Then followed a dance; and while this was going on, Henry descended from his throne, and began to move slowly round the room, attended by Gardiner and Norfolk.

"I miss Adrian Culpepper," he observed to the Duke. "I have not seen him at Greenwich for the last two or three days."

"He is forced to keep his room, sire, having been hurt in a conflict with one of the Earl of Essex's gentlemen."

"Forced to keep his room! Ha! Why was I not told of this? Is he much hurt?"

"Not much, I believe, sire."

Henry looked thoughtful for a moment, and then said, "I must speak to Cromwell about this affair. I fancy I know Adrian's adversary, and can guess the cause of quarrel."

"Your Majesty is better informed than I am," said the Duke. "I know nothing more than I have told you."

XV.

HOW CATHERINE CHARMED THE KING BY HER SINGING.

WHILE thus conversing, the King entered an inner room, in which tables were laid for cards and dice.

Henry the Eighth was a great gambler, as we learn from Sir Frederick Madden, who has shown, in the "Privy Purse Expenses," that the King's losses at cards, dice, tennis, and other games, amounted in three years to nearly four thousand pounds. Rarely a night passed that he did not play, and often deeply.

Aware of his tastes, Gardiner had provided for their gratification. Several young nobles were in the inner room when the King entered it, but no play was going on.

Henry seated himself at one of the tables, and the Comte de Marillac, who had followed his Majesty into the room, and who frequently played with him, approached—expecting an invitation to sit down—but the King had other business in hand.

He said a few words in a low tone to the Duke of Norfolk, who bowed and disappeared.

Before the Duke returned from the errand on which the King had despatched him, the dance had come to an end in the ball-room, but the ushers stationed at the door only allowed admittance to a few privileged persons. Amongst these were the Earl of Southampton, the Duke of Suffolk, and Sir Anthony Brown, with the Countesses of Rutland and Hertford—and after them, Cromwell and Audeley. As to Will Sommers, he followed his royal master about like a favourite spaniel.

Henry took little notice of those who came in, but conversed with the Comte de Marillac and Gardiner.

"I hope your excellency has been well cared for during the banquet," observed the hospitable Bishop.

"Never dined better," replied the courtly ambassador. "You have given us a sumptuous entertainment, my lord. I could not fail to be delighted with it, and I am under eternal obligations to you for placing me next the most charming person in the world. We have no such beauty in France as the Lady Catherine Howard. She far surpasses the Duchess of Longueville, whom your Majesty once deigned to admire."

"*Perdie!* I am of your excellency's opinion," observed the King.

"And she is as accomplished as she is lovely," pursued Marillac. "She conversed with me in French and surprised me with the fluency with which she speaks our language. M. de Chapuys was as much charmed with her as myself."

"Your excellency is not yet acquainted with all her accomplishments," said Gardiner.

"I am sure she sings well," rejoined the ambassador.

"How so?" demanded Henry.

"Because she has the sweetest voice I ever heard."

The King smiled.

"One would think you were in love with her, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur!"

"Sire, I am not likely to win such a treasure; but I shall certainly envy him who does. May I venture to ask if the Queen is fond of music?"

"She neither sings nor plays," replied the King gruffly.

"Her Majesty has accomplishments of a different kind," observed Gardiner.

"I have yet to discover them," muttered Henry.

Marillac and Gardiner exchanged glances.

Their looks were not unnoted by Cromwell, who was standing at a little distance with Audeley.

At this juncture, the Duke of Norfolk returned with Catherine and Lady Rochford. M. de Chapuys, the Imperial ambassador, came in at the same time.

"Gramercy, mignonne!" cried the King, graciously rising as Catherine approached. "I would not ask you to sing before so many; but here, you need not feel trepidation. I am prepared to be enchanted."

"I will do my best to content your Majesty," she replied.

After a few more gallant observations on the King's part, a cittern was brought her by a page.

And here let us remark that the instrument was nothing more than the modern guitar, though slightly

different in shape. At a later date, it was called a lute.

With a graceful obeisance to the King, she then seated herself on a velvet tabouret, while the courtly circle gathered round to listen to her strains.

While stringing the cittern, she said to the King who had resumed his seat, "With your Majesty's permission, I will sing a French chansonette."

"Nothing will delight me more," he rejoined. "You may consider this a compliment to yourself, Count," he added, to Marillac.

"Pardon me, sire," interrupted Chapuys, "I cannot allow his excellency to appropriate the whole of the compliment. I must claim some part of it."

A lively prelude put a stop to further conversation, and Catherine commenced her ditty—a gay little French song—as she had announced.

She sang it with incomparable archness and vivacity. Every point was heightened by glances from her resistless black eyes. These glances, it need scarcely be said, were chiefly directed towards the King.

He was enraptured, and, at the close of the ditty, called upon the fair songstress for another.

This time, she changed her theme. The burthen of the ballad was unrequited love, the words being in her own tongue.

The tender melancholy was exquisitely expressed by her voice and looks—so exquisitely, that Henry himself was touched, and exhibited some real emotion.

Catherine saw the impression she had produced. Without waiting for solicitation, she struck up a lively air, and finished as gaily as she had begun.

Never had the King been so delighted; never was he so lavish in his praises. Expressions of admiration were heard on all sides, but none more enthusiastic than those of the two ambassadors. Catherine's triumph was complete.

But it was of brief duration.

While her heart was beating high at the King's praises, a gentleman stepped forward to take the cittern.

Great was her horror when she perceived it was Francis Dereham.

He gazed at her steadfastly for a moment, bowed, and retired, leaving her in the utmost agitation.

Lady Rochford had recognised him, and determined, at any cost, to rid Catherine of her persecutor.

Accordingly, she seized the first opportunity of addressing the King.

"Will your Majesty confer an immense favour on Catherine Howard?"

"Why does she not ask the favour herself?" he rejoined, looking well disposed to grant it.

"She dares not, sire," said Lady Rochford. "Did your Majesty notice the person who took the cittern from her just now? It was Francis Dereham, who was dismissed from the service of the Duchess of Norfolk, and who is now one of the Earl of Essex's gentlemen."

The King uttered an exclamation of anger.

"What does he here?" he demanded.

"I know not, sire. But his presence is offensive to Catherine."

"'Tis offensive also to me," said Henry.

And he signed to Cromwell to come near.

Several circumstances had conspired that evening to heighten his displeasure against the minister, so that his wrath was ready to explode against him.

"Why have you brought Francis Dereham here?" he demanded, in a deep, stern tone.

Then without waiting for an answer, he added, "You did wrong."

"I cannot well explain my motive now, sire," replied Cromwell. "But I will satisfy you to-morrow."

"I will listen to no explanation," said Henry. "If the fellow presents himself before me again, he will rue it. I have just learnt that he has wounded Adrian Culpepper. If aught happens to Adrian, I will hang him."

"He deserves severe punishment for his insolence," said Lady Rochford.

"I pray you suspend your judgment till to-morrow, sire," said Cromwell. "When you know all, you will think differently."

"My Lord of Essex has some secret motive for protecting this villain—for a villain he is!" cried Lady Rochford, boldly.

"Shall I disclose my motive, madam?" said Cromwell.

Lady Rochford glanced at the King, who understood the appeal.

"Make no more mention of this man," he said, in an authoritative tone. "I peremptorily forbid it, on pain of my displeasure. Let him not appear before me again. If you retain him in your service after this, I shall deem it an affront to the Lady Catherine Howard."

"Sire!"

"See to it, or dread my resentment," cried Henry, imperiously. "Stand back, my lord. I have done."

And with a haughty gesture, he waved him off.

He then arose, and giving his hand to Catherine, led her into the ball-room, followed by Norfolk and Gardiner, who were delighted with the success of their scheme, and now felt sure of Cromwell's speedy downfall.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE FALL OF CROMWELL.

I.

THE RUBY RING.

More than a month had elapsed since the grand banquet at Winchester House.

Henry's passion for Catherine Howard had increased, and his antipathy to the Queen had become more violent. Already he had begun to meditate a divorce.

On several occasions he had dined privately with Gardiner, when Catherine, with her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, and Lady Rochford, were the Bishop's sole guests.

At these meetings, the haughty monarch completely unbent, and only played the part of a lover. Catherine delighted him with her musical skill, and he hung over enraptured, as she played upon the virginals or the cittern. Her influence over him was unbounded; but as yet she had sought no favour.

While Catherine was thus encouraging the King's addresses, and, at the instance of her advisers, unworthily consenting to supplant the Queen, had she no feelings of compunction?—no regret for the devoted Adrian Culpepper? Was she so dazzled by the prospect of a throne that she could see nothing else?

There were moments when her love for Adrian

returned in all its force, and well-nigh overthrew her resolutions. But the arguments employed by Lady Rochford kept her steady to her purpose.

Having recovered from his wound, Adrian had returned to Court, looking handsomer than ever. He soon perceived—like all the rest of the world—how completely Catherine's charms had fascinated the King, and he became jealous and miserable. But what could he do? Lady Rochford took care he should not have an opportunity of reproaching Catherine; for she would never allow her to grant him an interview in private. Still, when Catherine found his sad gaze fixed upon her, she could not help pitying him.

And Dereham? Had she no dread of this terrible and mysterious personage? Did she not fear he might cross her path? He scared her sometimes in her dreams, but Lady Rochford persuaded her he would trouble her no more.

With a patience allied to weakness, but, in reality, caused by fear, the ill-fated Queen submitted to her inconstant husband's neglect. She did not trouble him with complaints; and as to reproaches, she did not dare to utter them. She was not blind to his passion for Catherine; but she willingly shut her eyes to it.

Through the instrumentality of Cromwell, who, as the promoter of the ill-starred match, felt bound to look after her interests, an ample jointure had been settled on her. With this, and with the name of Queen, she was fain to be content.

Before the return of her brother's ambassadors to Cleves, they consulted with her privately, and counselled submission—advice she was well inclined to follow. They also deemed it right to warn her against Catherine

Howard, and the designs of Norfolk and Gardiner; but they comforted her by the assurance that Cromwell would free her from her dangerous rival.

Cromwell was not ignorant of the intrigues that were going on against him and the Queen. Well informed as to the meetings at Winchester House, and knowing how much progress the amorous monarch had made in his suit, he allowed the matter to proceed without interference on his part, because he felt certain he could bring it to an end whenever he pleased.

He had to submit to many public rebuffs from the King, but he did not heed them. His plan of preserving his power was to render himself indispensable. As long as he could fill the rapacious monarch's coffers, he felt secure. He had just obtained the enormous subsidy of twelve shillings in the pound from the clergy, and had ground down the laymen still more unmercifully. He also engaged to suppress the Knights Hospitallers, as he had suppressed the religious houses, and sequester their vast property to the King's use.

While thus employed, he set all his enemies at defiance, and laughed at their machinations.

Another month went on—another and another.

Things were in much the same state. Henry was completely enslaved. Catherine looked more beautiful than ever—more triumphant; for the divorce having now begun to be talked about, everybody regarded her as the future Queen.

She had not wholly ceased to love Adrian, but she seldom spoke of him; and she had succeeded in banishing Dereham from her thoughts—at least, for the time.

On three or four occasions, accompanied by the King, with Lady Rochford and some other ladies of the

Court, she had visited the old Duchess of Norfolk, at Lambeth, and had been treated with almost as much ceremony as if she had been actually Queen.

Adrian Culpepper formed part of the attendants in the royal barge on these occasions; and his sufferings may be imagined, while compelled to witness the King's attentions to Catherine.

Everything seemed to smile upon Catherine. The haughty monarch was now at her feet, and had become so passionately enamoured, that he could scarce live out of her society.

Many presents of jewellery had been made by the King to the fair object of his affections: a tablet of gold set with diamonds—a gold cross adorned with rubies—a diamond necklace—and a girdle of goldsmiths' work adorned with roses of rubies and pearls. He also gave her a ruby ring, bidding her wear it for his sake, and never part with it.

While Catherine Howard engrossed all the King's attentions, the neglected Queen was sent to Richmond, ostensibly for change of air, but really that she might be out of the way.

In that charming palace she passed her time very tranquilly, and was enabled to indulge her taste for good living, without fear of any unpleasant observations from his Majesty.

Cromwell had just achieved his last great task. He had suppressed—we should call it "disestablished"——the luckless Knights Hospitallers, and was now looking out for fresh spoils for his insatiable master.

The blow he meditated could not be much longer delayed. Yet he hesitated to strike it—perhaps, from a presentiment that it might recoil upon his own head.

The Court was still at Greenwich Palace. One day, when the King was playing tennis, of which recreation he was extremely fond, Catherine was alone in her private room with Lady Rochford.

The chamber communicated with the grand gallery, and was charmingly furnished, being hung with rich stuffs instead of tapestry. Its deep bay windows looked out upon the windings of the river, and commanded a distant view of the capital.

Catherine had been practising a ballad, written by Skelton, which she intended to sing to her royal admirer, and had just laid down her cittern, when a page entered with a letter.

As he bowed and delivered it to her, he said, "The person waits without. Will it please your ladyship to see her?"

Catherine opened the letter, and turned pale. But controlling her emotion, she said, "Admit her."

"Who is it?" inquired Lady Rochford noticing her uneasiness.

"Mary Lassells," replied Catherine.

At the mention of this name, Lady Rochford likewise became pale.

Again the page appeared, and introduced a young woman, the lower part of whose face was concealed by a muffler.

She made a deep reverence to Catherine as she came in, and as soon as the page had retired, removed her muffler, and disclosed features with which both ladies were well acquainted.

Mary Lassells—who, it will be remembered, was in possession of Catherine's dangerous secret—was about thirty, good looking, intelligent, but cunning and per-

fidious. She secretly enjoyed the confusion caused by her appearance.

As she remained silent, Catherine thus addressed her:—

"What brings you here, Lassells? You promised solemnly you would never trouble me again; and you well know I do not desire to see you now. If you want assistance, I am quite willing to befriend you."

"Your ladyship has always been kind to me," replied Mary Lassells. "May I speak freely?"

"You may," said Catherine. "Lady Rochford knows all."

"Then I need not hesitate to state that I have seen Francis Dereham."

"Do you come from that villain?" interrupted Lady Rochford. "If so, I advise the Lady Catherine not to listen to you."

"I am not sent by him," replied Mary Lassells, firmly. "My object is to serve the Lady Catherine, not to harm her. I heartily wish her all the wealth, prosperity, and honour she so well deserves, and I trust no obstacle will interfere with the attainment of her wishes. I have heard it said by those possessing good information, that before the Princess Anne of Cleves came to England there had been a contract of matrimony between her Highness and a German prince; and I now hear that on this ground, she is to be divorced from the King. It is also said that his Majesty designs to put the Lady Catherine Howard in her place; and certainly she is in all respects more worthy of the honour, but——"

"You fancy there may be some obstacle," said Lady Rochford.

"If a prior contract of matrimony can cause a divorce,

it seems to me that a similar engagement might prevent a second mariage," observed Mary Lassells.

"I knew there was danger," muttered Catherine. "At any price, this woman's silence must be purchased."

Though uttered in a low tone, the remark was not lost upon the cunning Lassells.

"You have been well schooled, Lassells; I suppose by Dereham?" observed Lady Rochford.

"You shall know the exact truth," replied the other. "I had gone to the north of England, with no thought of ever returning to London, when news of the Lady Catherine's advancement reached me, and feeling sure she would prove a good mistress to me, I ventured to come hither."

"She is well disposed towards you, as you see," said Lady Rochford; "but she must be certain she can trust you. Since you returned to London, have you seen Francis Dereham?"

"Do not equivocate," added Catherine. "I am aware he has been searching for you."

"Your ladyship is in the right—but he failed to discover my retreat," replied Mary Lassells. "I know he is one of the Lord Cromwell's gentlemen; but before holding any communication with him, or with the noble Earl, his master, I resolved to see your ladyship, and be governed by your wishes."

Catherine and Lady Rochford exchanged glances, knowing what was meant.

"You must neither see him nor the Lord Cromwell, Lassells," said Catherine.

"I am quite willing to obey your ladyship. But the Lord Cromwell may summon me before him, and interrogate me. Under your ladyship's protection, I should be safe."

"You cannot have her with you in the Palace—'twould be too dangerous," whispered Lady Rochford.

"I must," replied Catherine. "It is only thus I can defeat their designs.—— You shall stay with me, Lassells," she added. "But you must promise absolute fidelity."

"I swear to be faithful to you to the death," cried Lassells, dropping on her knees, and kissing Catherine's hand. "Were I placed on the rack, I would never betray you!"

"Enough!" cried Catherine. "Henceforward, you are one of my personal attendants. Have you any little boon to ask from me?"

"Yes, if I dared ask it," replied Lassells.

"Speak! What is it?" said Catherine, smiling.

"This ring!" cried the cunning woman, who had noticed the ruby.

"Why, you cannot wear it!—'tis not fit for you."

"No matter!" cried Lassells, eagerly. "Give it me, I entreat you! I have set my heart upon it."

Catherine drew it from her finger, and presented it to her.

"Mind! it must seal your lips for ever," she said.

"It shall!" cried Lassells, springing to her feet—her eyes blazing with strange light.

"What folly is this?" cried Lady Rochford. in dismay. "The King bade you never part with that ring."

"I do not think he will miss it," said Catherine. "But if he should, Lassells will give it me back, and she shall have another."

Lady Rochford did not appear satisfied, and might have required immediate restitution of the gem, had not an interruption occurred at the moment.

Adrian Culpepper was ushered in by the page. His

manner was cold and ceremonious. With a formal bow, he said, "I am come to conduct the Lady Catherine Howard and the Lady Rochford to the King."

"We are ready to attend you," replied Catherine. "Is his Majesty still in the tennis-court?"

"He quitted it half an hour ago, to confer with the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester. Something has occurred to ruffle him—I know not what. The Lord Cromwell is in the palace."

"But not with the King?" cried Catherine, uneasily.

"No; he was refused an audience; but he has not yet departed. He waits in the hope that the King may change his mind, and send for him. He has often done so before."

"But he shall not do so now," replied Catherine.

"You have nothing to fear from him," said Adrian.

"I shall never feel safe till he is lodged in the Tower. He would poison the King's mind against me, if he could."

"You look upon him as an enemy, because he would prevent the divorce," said Adrian, in a low tone. "I, too, would prevent it; and yet I am not your enemy, as you well know."

"No more of this, Adrian," she rejoined.

Seeing they were about to depart, Mary Lassells, who had withdrawn on Adrian's appearance, came forward.

"Has your ladyship any commands for me?" she said.

"Remain here—in the ante-chamber—till my return," replied Catherine.

The woman's face seemed familiar to Adrian.

"Is it not Mary Lassells, whom I remember as your tirewoman?" he asked.

"It is," replied Catherine. "I have just taken her again into my service."

"I hope she will serve you well," said Adrian, with a look that implied a doubt.

II.

SHOWING HOW CROMWELL'S DESIGNS WERE FRUSTRATED.

CROMWELL had come to Greenwich Palace that day, fully resolved to strike the blow he had so long meditated. He brought Dereham with him, as that person's testimony would be needed; but he left him in the barge till he should be summoned to the King's presence.

The blow, if successful, was to be followed up by others equally important. After the revelations he designed to make, he felt sure that Henry's wrath would be kindled against Norfolk and Gardiner, and he expected to obtain a warrant for their immediate committal to the Tower. By this master-stroke he should destroy his opponents, and at the same time arrest the divorce.

But his enemies were beforehand with him, and took care he should not obtain access to the King.

Accordingly, as we have seen, on his arrival at the palace, he was refused admission to the royal presence. But he was not to be deterred from making a further effort, and remained.

Meanwhile, Norfolk and Gardiner were closeted with the King, and using every endeavour possible to accomplish their opponent's ruin.

"What charges in particular do you bring against

him?" demanded Henry, who had been listening with a stern countenance to Norfolk's representations. "Let me hear them."

"All that I charge against him can be proved, as will appear, when his papers are seized," replied the Duke. "I charge him, in his capacity of Prime Minister, with receiving enormous bribes, and encroaching on the royal authority."

The King uttered an exclamation of displeasure.

"As Vicar-General, I accuse him of entertaining heretical opinions, and I can substantiate the charge," said Gardiner.

"That is nothing new, my lord Bishop," observed Henry. "He must be guilty of heresy in your eyes, and would retort that you too rigorously adhere to the old doctrines."

"But he has carried his zeal to a treasonable extent," said Norfolk. "On one occasion, in the warmth of argument with the Earl of Southampton, he plucked forth his poniard, and declared he would maintain the cause of the Reformation, sword in hand, even against your Majesty!"

"Ha! said he so? By our Lady, he *is* a traitor, and deserves death!" cried the King, furiously.

"In many important matters, as can be shown, he has abused your Majesty's confidence, and betrayed his trust," said Gardiner. "I need scarcely remind you of his want of scruple in involving your Majesty in a matrimonial treaty, the real object of which was to strengthen his own power, without regard to any other consideration."

"True," remarked the King; "his conduct therein was unpardonable. He forced me into a marriage that

I detested; but, by St. Anne, he will find it the worst day's work he ever performed."

"The worst has still to be stated against him," said Norfolk.

"Ha! what more remains?" cried Henry.

"No greater crime can be committed by a minister than to alienate from his sovereign the affections of a large portion of the people. This Cromwell hath done. He has become extraordinarily odious to the people, and must be sacrificed to their just resentment."

At this moment, the fold of tapestry that masked the entrance of the cabinet was drawn aside by an usher, and Catherine entered, followed by Lady Rochford and Adrian.

"You are just in time, Kate, to hear my decision," said Henry. "I have resolved to commit Cromwell to the Tower. If he be found guilty of the crimes laid to his charge, he will lose his head."

"They are certain to be proved against him, sire," said Norfolk.

"Yet let me intercede for him," said Catherine.

"You forget that he is your enemy, Kate," cried the King.

"No, sire. I would have him punished, but not with death. Spare him, I beseech you!"

"The people clamour against him, sire," said Norfolk, sternly. "His death alone will pacify them."

"They shall be contented," rejoined the King, with a stern smile. "I cannot grant your request, Kate, and 'tis best I should not."

"Still I would rather he lived, even though he plotted against me," she sighed.

"You have a gentle heart, Kate," said Henry, taking

her hand; "but it cannot be as you wish. He must die. Ha! where is the ruby ring I gave you?"

"Is it not on my finger, sire?" she rejoined, feigning surprise.

"You see it is not," he remarked, suspiciously.

"I must have left it on my toilet-table," she replied, carelessly. "I will put it on anon."

"See you do," he rejoined.

Here the Duke of Norfolk interposed.

"Cromwell is without, sire," he said. "Shall I arrest him on his departure?"

"Not here," rejoined Henry. "Arrest him at the council-board to-morrow. His disgrace must be public."

"Your Majesty is right," replied the Duke.

At this moment, an usher entered, and said that the Lord Cromwell implored an audience of his Majesty.

"He is importunate," cried Henry, sternly. "I have already declared I will not see him."

Thereupon, the usher withdrew.

Not long afterwards, Henry, and all those with him, issued from the cabinet, and traversing the great hall, which was crowded, as usual, with ushers, pages, and gentlemen, went out upon the terrace facing the river.

His Majesty had ordered his barge to be got ready to proceed to York Place, where he intended to spend the remainder of the day. Catherine and Lady Rochford, with several other Court dames, were to accompany him.

As the royal party approached the place of embarkation, they perceived Cromwell standing among the attendants, near the head of the stairs. He evidently intended to make a last effort to obtain speech of the King.

With him was Dereham, a circumstance that awak-

ened Catherine's worst apprehensions. She glanced at Lady Rochford, and saw that her looks reflected her own uneasiness.

Cromwell prostrated himself before the King, but Henry haughtily repulsed him, declining to hear a word he had to say.

"If you will not hear me, sire, at least listen to this person," cried Cromwell, calling Dereham forward. "He has something to reveal that concerns you much to know."

Henry paused for a moment, his curiosity being excited.

"Speak! What is it?" he cried.

Catherine gave herself up for lost. But Adrian Culpepper flew to the rescue.

"Give no heed to the knave, sire," he cried. "His heart is full of deceit and treachery; and whatever he may say to you will be false. Look at him, sire! Tis Francis Dereham! Do you not recognise him?"

"Ay, by St. Anne, I recognise him now!" rejoined Henry. "The fellow's audacity is astounding!"

"It is the more astounding, considering his career," said Adrian. "Since revelations are to be made, let him recount his own history to your Majesty."

"It is a portion of my own history that I desire to relate, if your Majesty will deign to listen to it," said Dereham.

"Your exploits with Dragut, the corsair, will interest his Majesty most," observed Adrian. "Begin with those."

"I will begin at an earlier date," said Dereham, boldly. "If my memory fails me, the Lady Catherine Howard will assist me."

"Ha! dar'st thou mention that lady's name, villain?"

cried Henry, furiously. "Thou shalt rue thine insolence! I now see why thou hast been brought here."

"Hang him, sire!—hang him! He richly deserves it, for a false knave that he is!" cried Will Sommers, who was standing behind.

"Do with me what you will, sire," said Dereham; "but let me explain."

"Peace!" thundered Henry. "You say he has sailed with Dragut, the corsair?" he added to Adrian.

"He is a pirate and a cut-throat! The Lord Cromwell knows it, and yet hath protected him!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the King.

"I know him only as one of the Duchess of Norfolk's gentlemen," said Cromwell. "But I know, also, that he is——"

"A corsair!" cried Will Sommers, in a shrill voice.

At another moment this sally might have caused a smile; but the King glanced angrily at Cromwell.

"I have been told that you have protected certain desperadoes, my lord!" he said. "But till now I did not believe it."

"Do not believe it now, sire," rejoined Cromwell. "It has not yet been proved that Dereham is a corsair."

"The truth shall be wrested from him by the rack," said Henry. "Let him be taken to the Tower forthwith!"

In obedience to a sign from the Duke of Norfolk, Dereham was immediately surrounded by the halberdiers stationed near the stairs, while Henry, without bestowing another look on Cromwell, entered the barge.

III.

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER.

In a large antique chamber, lined with crimson tissue, adorned with gold roses and *fleurs-de-lis,* sat Henry and his Council.

The superb canopy of the throne was deeply fringed with gold, and embroidered at the back with the royal arms and supporters of the Tudors. The ceiling was of timber-work divided into squares, richly painted and gilt, and the pendants were likewise gilt, producing a gorgeous effect.

Over his magnificent attire Henry wore a robe of purple velvet, furred with ermine. Around his neck was the collar of the Garter. He had just taken his seat upon the throne, and cast a stern glance at the Council, who were seated in a wide semi-circle around him.

All were in their places except the Duke of Norfolk, and Henry well knew why he was absent.

Right and left of the throne were the Duke of Suffolk, the Lord Chancellor Audley, Sir Thomas Wriothesley, and the Earl of Southampton.

Not far from the King, on a chair apart from the rest, sat Cromwell. He was unconscious of the peril in which he stood, yet his countenance was troubled. On the King's entrance into the council-chamber he had endeavoured to catch his eye, but Henry would not notice him.

The principal matter before the Council on that day

was the King's intended divorce from Anne of Cleves. The pretext on which Henry demanded a release from his matrimonial bonds were Anne's pre-contract with the Prince of Lorraine, and his own espousal of her against his will.

Cromwell maintained the validity of the marriage. The first objection, he declared, had been discussed before the solemnization of the nuptials, and the difficulty was then got over. As to the second objection, he contended it had no weight whatever. No contract could subsist, if one of the parties was enabled to declare that he had given no inward consent to it.

All his arguments were vain. No other voice, except his own, was raised against the divorce, and his useless opposition only rendered the King more determined on his destruction.

At the close of the deliberation, which was entirely favourable to the King's wishes, the doors of the council-chamber were thrown open, and Henry descended from the throne.

As he passed Cromwell, he paused for a moment, and looking at him sternly, said, "The fetters you have placed upon me are broken. The divorce will be solemnly pronounced to-morrow, and confirmed next day by Parliament."

"And your Majesty will be free to wed Catherine Howard," rejoined Cromwell. "Yet I beseech you pause. 'Twill be well to avoid another divorce."

"Ha! dost dare to insinuate aught?" cried Henry, furiously.

"I insinuate nothing, sire," replied Cromwell. "I have spoken as freely as you will allow me—too freely, perhaps, for my own safety. It has ever been my anxious

care to preserve you from all danger. And were these my last words to you, I would counsel you not to take a step which I consider fraught with peril."

"They *are* thy last words to me!" said Henry.

And with this terrible rejoinder he quitted the council-chamber.

IV.

HOW CROMWELL WAS ARRESTED, AND TAKEN TO THE TOWER.

CROMWELL, who took precedence of the other lords of the Council, was preparing slowly to follow, when the Duke of Norfolk, with his sword drawn, and attended by a guard, entered, and marched up to him.

On beholding the Duke, Cromwell understood his purpose, but he maintained a firm demeanour.

"My lord, I arrest you of high treason!" said Norfolk. "Behold the royal warrant for your committal to the Tower."

"I am no traitor!" cried Cromwell. "How could I be a traitor to the Sovereign to whom I owe everything? I have preserved the King from many treasons; and few plots have been so secretly conceived, but that I have detected them. Heaven is my witness that I ever served his Majesty faithfully. My zeal, indeed, has made me many enemies among your lordships, as ye show by your rejoicing at my disgrace. But I shall yet clear myself, and obtain the King's pardon."

"Think it not," said Norfolk.

"At least, I shall not be condemned unheard," rejoined Cromwell. "I demand a public trial before my peers. I can produce orders from the King that cannot be disavowed, and that will entirely exculpate me."

"Such consideration as you have shown others will be shown you, my lord," said Norfolk, sternly. "You have established a precedent that a person accused of treason can be attainted without previous trial or confession. The weapon you employed against the Marchioness of Exeter and the Countess of Salisbury will be used against yourself. You will be proceeded against by bill of attainder."

All Cromwell's courage forsook him. "'Tis retribution!" he groaned.

Presently he added, in a supplicating tone, "I pray you, my lord, that I may be taken, in the first instance, to my own house. This heavy calamity has fallen upon me suddenly. I have most important papers——"

"Do not concern yourself about them, my lord," interrupted Norfolk. "Your papers have already been seized, and your secret correspondence with the princes of Germany has been discovered."

"That seals your doom!" said the Duke of Suffolk, who was standing near. "The King will never forgive the betrayal of his confidence."

Cromwell's head fell upon his breast. He was surrounded by the guard, and taken to the privy stairs of the palace, where a barge was waiting to convey him to the Tower.

It being incumbent upon the Duke of Norfolk to deliver the prisoner into the custody of the Lieutenant of the Tower, he accompanied him in his passage down the river, and sat with him in the cabin.

For some time, not a word passed between them. At length, the Duke broke silence.

"Have you heard what has befallen your follower, Francis Dereham?" he remarked.

"Has he expired upon the rack?" said Cromwell, raising his head.

"He has not even been put to the question," replied the Duke. "By a culpable arrangement, he was taken by night from Greenwich to the Tower, and contrived to escape by plunging overboard from the boat. The guard fired at him, and I believe hit him, but the body has not been found."

"He is a bold fellow!" said Cromwell. And he muttered to himself, "Perchance, he has not perished; and if I fall, he may avenge me!"

He then relapsed into silence, nor did the Duke disturb him further.

Awful thoughts possessed him as the terrible state-prison in which he was to be confined came in sight.

Numbers had been sent to the Tower by his orders, and he had turned a deaf ear to their supplications, and hurried them recklessly to the scaffold. Now their sufferings were brought home to him. He would have to endure like agonies, and could expect no more pity than he himself had shown.

Already, he had experienced that a fallen minister has no friends. When he was arrested in the council-chamber, all his flatterers abandoned him, and seemed to rejoice in his disgrace. Having accomplished his ruin, his implacable enemies would never rest till they had brought him to the block. Yet he had still hopes in the King's mercy, and persuaded himself he could move that obdurate heart.

Norfolk, whose cold gaze was fixed upon him, could read what was passing in his breast, and enjoyed his agony. He noticed the shudder that passed over the prisoner's frame as he glanced at the sombre pile. He saw the deadly pallor that overspread his countenance, and the damps that gathered thickly on his brow.

The illustrious prisoner's approach had been signalled by the sentinels on St. Thomas's Tower. Drums were beat in the lower ward, and Sir William Kingston, Lieutenant of the Tower, attended by a guard of halberdiers, proceeded to Traitors' Gate.

Meanwhile, the ponderous wooden gates had been thrown open to admit the barge, and closed again as it passed beneath the low-browed archway.

At that trying moment Cromwell's heart sank within him, and the groan he could not suppress was music in Norfolk's ears.

At the head of the steps stood the Lieutenant of the Tower, with some of his officers, while the halberdiers were drawn up in the rear.

The guard having quitted the barge, the Duke of Norfolk offered his hand to Cromwell to assist him to disembark, but he haughtily refused the aid, and mounted the steps alone.

The Duke then formally delivered his prisoner to the lieutenant, who received him with an expression of concern that greatly touched the unhappy man.

"I never thought to see your lordship here in this guise," said the lieutenant, in a tone of profound commiseration.

"Nor I to visit you thus, good Sir William," replied Cromwell. "Where will you lodge me?"

"There are many prisoners of importance in the

Tower, as you wot, my lord," replied Kingston. "The Bishop of Chichester and Doctor Wilson, whom you sent here only a week ago, for refusing the oath of supremacy, are in the Bowyer Tower, where I could have given you a good lodging."

"Can you not remove the Bishop?" observed Norfolk. "He ought to make way for the Vicar-General."

"You might have spared me that cruel taunt, my lord," said Cromwell.

"I now bethink me that the chief room in the Beauchamp Tower is vacant," observed Kingston.

"Why, that was occupied by the Lord Montague, one of your latest victims," remarked the Duke to Cromwell.

"The dead will not disturb me: 'tis the living I fear," rejoined the fallen minister. "Let me have that chamber, good Master Lieutenant."

"I will conduct your lordship thither at once," said Kingston.

"I will see him safely bestowed," observed Norfolk.

They then proceeded to the inner ward, in which the Beauchamp Tower is situated. Half-a-dozen halberdiers marched in front of the prisoner, and a like number followed him.

Cromwell walked slowly, and paused, after mounting the ascent from the Bloody Tower. Several persons were collected on the green to see him pass.

Conspicuous among them, from the position he had chosen, as well as from his peculiar garb, was an ill-favoured individual, who, with his brawny arms folded upon his chest, kept his eye fixed upon the prisoner. His muscular frame was displayed in a tight-fitting buff jerkin, darkly-stained in many places. Black elf-locks descending from beneath his cap added to the sinister

expression of his countenance. He was lame, it appeared, for when the prisoner halted, he limped towards him, and reverently doffed his cap.

"Who art thou, fellow?" demanded Cromwell, looking at him. "Methinks I know thee."

"I am Mauger, the headsman, my lord," replied the fellow, with a detestable grin. "I thank you for the constant work you have given me."

"Back, caitiff," cried the Duke of Norfolk, thrusting him aside. "Thou art not wanted yet."

V.

THE PRISON CHAMBER IN THE BEAUCHAMP TOWER.

THE prison-lodging to which Cromwell was conducted was accounted the best and most commodious in the Tower.

The Beauchamp Tower is the central fortification on the west side of the inner ballium wall; and the room assigned to the fallen minister is on the upper story, and reached by a circular stone staircase.

Its walls are of immense thickness, as is shown by the great depth of the embrasures. Connected with it are a couple of cells, in which the prisoners were secured at night. The door is of massive oak, studded with hammer-headed nails.

Throughout the latter part of Henry the Eighth's terrible reign, all the fortifications of the Tower were converted into prisons. All the underground dungeons were filled. Constant employment was found for the

gaolers, and for the executioner and their aids, and if the latter had not been called frequently into play, the prisons would have been over-crowded.

Cromwell was alone in the chamber we have described in the Beauchamp Tower. The Duke of Norfolk, Kingston, and the gaoler were gone. The stout oak door was locked upon him, and the heavy bolts shot into their sockets.

Alone, and a prisoner. That morn he had been lodged in a sumptuous apartment, with grooms and pages to wait upon him; now he was entombed within stone walls, and had not a single attendant. Ushers, gentlemen pensioners, all his glittering retinue, had disappeared.

With him, it had but been a single step from a palace to a prison. The transition was too sudden—the shock too great. He hoped he was in a frightful dream, from which he should speedily awake, and find himself reposing on a damask couch and on a pillow of down.

Alas! it was hard reality. He was no longer clothed with power. He had no longer a princely retinue. His enemies had defeated him. He was overthrown and disgraced—irretrievably ruined.

The Romish clergy, who abhorred him for his spoliations and exactions; the nobles, who hated him for his mean origin and his pride; the common people, to whom he was odious; all were eager for his blood.

Deprived of the means of defence, he should be attainted and convicted, and either burnt as a heretic at the stake, or decapitated as a traitor on Tower Hill, at the King's pleasure.

So overcome was he with these afflicting thoughts, that, fancying himself in the presence of the King, he

fell on his knees, and, clasping his hands, exclaimed, in heart piercing accents,

"Shut not your ears to your suppliant, most gracious prince! I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy!"

VI.

THE REPUDIATED QUEEN.

THE ill-fated Anne of Cleves, as we have already mentioned, had been compelled to remove from Greenwich, and take up her residence in the palace of Richmond.

The comparative privacy in which she lived suited her better than the splendour of the Court she had quitted; and however she might feel the King's neglect, she uttered no complaint.

Richmond was one of the most beautiful of the royal palaces, as will be easily understood by those acquainted with the charming situation which it occupied on the banks of the Thames.

A magnificent specimen of Tudor architecture, it was erected by Henry the Seventh, on the site of the ancient Palace of Shene, which had been destroyed by fire. Thenceforward its designation was changed, by royal command, to Richmond.

When Cardinal Wolsey occupied the palace, at a later date, the servants of the old King used to say to each other, "So a butcher's dog doth dwell at the manor of Richmond."

On his accession to the throne, Henry the Eighth

kept his Christmas at Richmond, and subsequently held a grand tournament there, at which he splintered many lances.

Among the most illustrious guests at the palace was the Emperor Charles the Fifth, who was enchanted with the spot. But when Henry obtained Hampton Court from Wolsey, he rarely visited Richmond.

The river façade of Richmond Palace, with its immense bay windows and countless turrets, was most picturesque and striking, and the loftiness of the edifice rendered it conspicuous for miles around.

Its internal arrangements corresponded with its magnificent exterior. It possessed a great hall, one hundred feet in length and forty wide, at the lower end of which was a superbly carved oak screen. The chapel was nearly as large as the hall, and had a choir and canopied stalls like a cathedral. Here Henry the Seventh heard mass twice a-day. The privy lodgings amply sufficed for a regal household.

Overlooking the gardens was a long, open gallery, in which the repudiated Queen took constant exercise. Let it not be imagined that she was moped at Richmond—on the contrary, she was far more cheerful than she had been at Greenwich or York House. Though treated in all respects like a queen, she was not allowed to leave the palace. But she did not appear to feel the constraint, and expressed no desire to stray beyond the gardens, being content to gaze upon the silver river, and the lovely region beyond it.

Cromwell's disgrace was a heavy blow to Anne, inasmuch as it deprived her of her best friend.

On the third day after this event, the Duke of Suffolk, Grand Master, the Earl of Southampton, Lord Privy

Seal, and Sir Thomas Wriothesley, the King's Secretary, arrived at Richmond Palace.

Not knowing what was to be her fate, the poor Queen, who had been kept in a state of dreadful suspense, sank to the ground in a swoon.

When she recovered she received them in her private apartments, and was inexpressibly relieved when Suffolk explained that all they required was her assent to the divorce.

"His Majesty has the most gracious intentions towards you, madam," said the Duke; "and I hope you will not thwart him by any useless opposition."

"Fear me not, my lord," she replied, humbly; "I will entirely conform myself to his Majesty's pleasure."

"I am glad to find you have come to so wise a determination, madam. If you are willing to relinquish the title of Queen—to which you have no longer any claim, since the sentence of divorce has been solemnly pronounced, and both yourself and the King are free to marry again—his Majesty graciously designs to adopt you as a sister."

"Does he propose to adopt me as his sister?" exclaimed Anne, joyfully; "I desire nothing better. I would rather be his sister than his consort."

Suffolk had some difficulty in preserving his gravity, but he continued, "You will take precedence over every dame at Court, except the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth, and his Majesty's intended consort."

"Then he *is* about to wed the Lady Catherine Howard?" cried Anne.

"Ay, madam," replied the Duke.

"I do not envy her," murmured Anne.

"Madam," said Southampton, "I rejoice to find you

so conformable to the King's wishes. Anticipating nothing less, his Majesty has authorized me to state that this palace will be granted to you as a residence, with an endowment of twelve thousand crowns a-year."

"Am I not, then, permitted to return to Cleves?" inquired Anne, uneasily.

"His Majesty is unwilling to part with you," said Southampton. "And he hopes you will write to your brother, the Duke of Cleves, in such terms as will prevent all misunderstanding."

"I will obey his Majesty's behests," replied Anne. "My brother shall learn from me that I have been most honourably treated, and that, with heaven's grace, I purpose to spend my life in this realm."

Then taking off her wedding-ring, she presented it to Southampton, saying, in moving accents, "On this ring, as you see, is inscribed, 'God send me well to keep.' God hath not permitted me to wear it long; but He has preserved me from peril. His will be done! I will charge you with a letter to the King—now my most benign and good brother,—in which I will strive to thank him adequately for his great goodness and liberality towards me. I will also write to my brother, to Duke of Cleves."

"The King must see the letter," observed Southampton.

"You shall carry it to him, my lord. I doubt not he will approve it."

"You will not fare the worse for this ready compliance with his Majesty's wishes," said Wriothesley. "How highly he esteems you will be apparent, when I inform you that he has sent you five hundred marks in gold, which we will pay to your cofferer. He has also

sent you certain rich stuffs for your apparel, and a princely gift of jewels."

"Jewels!" exclaimed Anne. "He is most gracious. I pray you let me see them."

By this time, she had quite recovered her spirits, and manifested the greatest delight in examining the diamonds and rich stuffs which the King's messengers had brought her, but which they had prudently kept back till they had ascertained her sentiments.

Well satisfied with the result of their mission, they returned to Greenwich.

"Is she content?" demanded Henry, when they presented themselves before him.

"More than content, sire—she is overjoyed," replied Norfolk.

"How?—overjoyed!" exclaimed the King, frowning. "Has she no regrets at her separation from me?"

"None that I could discover, sire. She seemed delighted at regaining her freedom, and escaping with her head. I never saw her display so much vivacity as she did while inspecting your presents. You would scarce have known her."

"Said she aught of Cromwell?" demanded the King.

"She did not utter a single word that could displease you, sire," replied the Duke. "She conforms entirely to your wishes. She has written submissively to you; and she has also written, as you enjoined, to the Duke of Cleves. Here are both letters."

"Here is her wedding-ring, which she returns you, sire," said Southampton.

"I do not care to see it," replied Henry. And he muttered to himself, "She is a good woman. Had she been fairer, she might have continued Queen."

VII.

HOW CATHERINE REGAINED THE RING.

All obstacles, as he deemed, to his union with Catherine Howard being removed by the divorce which he had obtained from his slavish Parliament, Henry would brook no delay.

His pleasure was that the marriage should be solemnized privately at Winchester House by Gardiner. Catherine had no desire for a public ceremonial, accompanied by pageants and processions like those that had lent a false glitter to Anne of Cleves's ill-starred nuptials.

Much popular sympathy had been excited for the repudiated Queen; and if rejoicings had been attempted for her successor, they might have occasioned disturbances.

As the time approached when the irretrievable step must be taken, Catherine's uneasiness increased. Often did she resolve to throw herself at Henry's feet, and acknowledge all; but the terror he inspired her with was so great, that her courage always forsook her. It was her fate, and she could not avoid it.

On the night before the wedding-day, she was alone in her own room in the palace, completely worn out by the ceremonious attentions she had been compelled to pay to the numerous Court dames who had visited her.

Painful thoughts oppressed her. At that supreme moment, when her heart ought to have been closed

against him, her love for Adrian Culpepper revived, and with greater intensity than ever.

Bitterly—most bitterly—did she reproach herself for deserting him. She uttered his name aloud, coupled with the tenderest epithets. Had any of her attendants appeared at that moment, discovery would have been inevitable, for she was utterly unable to control herself.

At last, she proceeded to a little oratory adjoining the apartment; and fell on her knees before the Madonna.

Her serenity being partially restored, she returned to the room she had left.

Some one was there. Could it be Adrian? She sprang towards him, but recoiled on discovering that it was Francis Dereham.

"You are mistaken," he said. "It is not he you called upon in your anguish, but one who, despite your falsehood and perfidy, still loves you. I was behind the arras just now, and your cries, although addressed to another, pierced my heart. I pity you, Catherine, and will save you. I would rather you became Adrian's bride, than the victim of the tyrant to whom you are about to sacrifice yourself to-morrow. Fly with me, while there is yet time."

"I will not trust you," she rejoined. "Depart instantly, or I will summon the attendants."

And she made as if she would strike the silver bell upon the table.

"Summon them," cried Dereham, "and you will be transferred from this palace to the Tower. You do not love Adrian, or you would not reject my offer. You are dazzled by the splendour of a throne, and rush, like the moth, to the flame that will consume you. Yet the ter-

rible consequences of the step you are about to take might well deter you. From the moment you become Henry's bride, your punishment will begin. Terrors you dream not of will disturb you. Henry is enamoured of you now, but he will tire of you as he has tired of the others. Some new enchantress will captivate him. Anne Boleyn's fate will be your fate. The axe will be employed to sever the knot that cannot be untied. At that dread hour he will seek for proofs of your criminality, and he will find them."

"My criminality!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"Do you recognise this ruby ring? 'Tis the King's gift. He bade you keep it. Being in my possession, it will suffice to condemn you."

"Mary Lassells will prove that I gave it to her."

"Ay! as a love-token to me."

"'Tis false! I had no thought of you," returned Catherine.

"Will the King believe your professions of innocence, with such evidence against you as this ring affords? You know he will not. His suspicions are already aroused. He has asked for the gem, and you have been unable to produce it. Be sure he will bear the circumstance in mind."

"You will destroy yourself by your villany."

"I care not. I shall have revenge. Now you comprehend that you are in my power. But I am not utterly devoid of pity. I cannot resist your tears. You shall have the ring on one condition."

"Name it," she cried, eagerly.

"The infatuated King will refuse you nothing at this moment. Ask Cromwell's pardon. He is condemned to death, as you know. All intercession—even Cranmer's

—has proved fruitless. But *you* will prevail, for, as I have just said, the King will refuse you nothing."

"I cannot do this, Dereham. I dare not act in opposition to the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester. They would never forgive me."

"Reflect. You had better comply."

"I cannot—I dare not."

"As you will. Hereafter, you will regret your decision."

"Hold! I agree. Give me the ring."

"Take it. I have your promise."

"Now I am safe!" she mentally ejaculated, as she slipped the ring on her finger.

"The pardon must be obtained without delay," said Dereham. "If the death-warrant be signed, the King will not revoke it."

"I will seize the first favourable moment. Now begone. Your presence here endangers all."

"I have something more to say," he remarked, evidently loth to depart.

"Not now—not now!" she exclaimed.

Just then, Mary Lassells entered, alarm depicted on her countenance.

"A company of masquers is coming hither," she cried. "Do you not hear the strains of minstrelsy?"

And as she spoke, the sound of lively music was heard without.

"They are in the corridor. The King is with them."

"Oh, heavens! I am lost! You have destroyed me!" cried Catherine to Dereham.

"Fear nothing," he rejoined. "The King shall not find me here. Now you can fulfil your promise."

And as he spoke, he passed quickly into the oratory, and concealed himself behind the arras with which the walls were covered.

VIII.

THE MASQUE.

Scarcely had Dereham disappeared, when the door was thrown open by a portly personage, whom Catherine doubted not was the King, though his features were hidden by a vizard.

Henry was in masquing attire, as Mary Lassells had stated, and wore a splendid mantle of cloth of silver, lined with blue velvet, the silver being pounced in letters, so that the velvet could be seen through it. His doublet and hose were of the like rich stuff.

A blaze of wax torches, carried in staffs, showed a troop of masquers behind him—gallants in splendid mantles like his own, and dames in gowns of blue velvet, lined with cloth of gold, and headgear of burnished gold.

All were masked.

Comprehending, at once, that this was intended as a pleasant surprise to her, Catherine stepped forward, and without appearing to recognise the chief masquer as the King begged him to bring in his company.

Thereupon he signed to the others, who instantly flocked in, and ranged themselves for a bransle.

At the same time the apartment was brilliantly lighted up by the torch-bearers; while the minstrels

stationed themselves in the rear. As the company came in, Mary Lassells quitted the room.

The chief masquer did not offer his hand to Catherine for the dance, but sent a gay and agile gallant as his substitute.

The music then struck up, and the bransle commenced, and was danced with great spirit.

While it was going on, the King seated himself in a fauteuil, and chatted with Will Sommers, who stood at his elbow.

Henry had taken off his vizard, but the rest of the company remained masked.

"How briskly they foot it," remarked the jester. "'Tis a pity you and I, gossip Hal, cannot take part in the bransle. We must be content to look on."

"Ay, marry!" rejoined the King. "And there is something worth looking at. Didst ever see aught so graceful as our bride?"

"Were I to give utterance to all I think, you might be jealous, gossip. Who is he that dances with her?"

"The only person worthy to be her partner, and our proxy—Adrian Culpepper," replied Henry.

"I guessed 'twas he. But methinks he doth not dance with his customary spirit to-night."

"Trouble me not about him," observed Henry. "I have eyes for none but the mistress of my heart. Every moment I discover some new charm in her," he added, rapturously.

"Certes, you will have the fairest spouse in Christendom, gossip," said the jester.

"And the most loving," rejoined the King.

"May be. Has she found the ruby ring you gave her?"

"Why dost ask?" cried the King, sharply.

"Nay, I had no special motive for the question. I heard you inquire for the ring—that is all."

"I will see anon," observed Henry.

Though Adrian did not unmask when, by the King's command, he led Catherine to the dance, she did not fail to recognise him.

Not a word, however, passed between them till a pause ensued, and then she remarked, in a low tone, "I have something to say to you, Adrian."

"Speak, madam," he rejoined, coldly. "I am all attention."

"If you knew how wretched I am, you would compassionate me."

"You wretched, madam!" he exclaimed, in an incredulous tone. "Impossible! You have succeeded in your aim; you have reached the summit of your ambition. To-morrow you will be Queen of England."

"I would give up all this grandeur to be back again at the old mansion at Lambeth."

"Do you ever think of it?" he cried.

"Often—often; and with bitter regret."

"Why did you leave it? Oh, Catherine——"

Then, suddenly checking himself, he added, "For an instant, I lived in the past. One whom I had wooed, whose heart I fancied I had won, seemed to stand before me. She is gone, and in her place appears the Queen. Forgive me, madam; I will not so offend again."

"You have not offended me, Adrian. 'Tis I who am to blame; 'tis I who ought to supplicate for forgiveness from you. Say you forgive me!"

"Take care, madam; you will be overheard. The King approaches."

Almost as the caution was given, Henry came up.

"You look fatigued, sweetheart," he said.

"I feel so," she replied. "Pray excuse me, sir; I can dance no more," she added, to Adrian, who bowed and retired.

"Let us step into the oratory for a moment, sire," she observed, to the King. "The odour of the torches is too much for me."

Henry took her hand to conduct her thither, and as they entered the oratory, he said, "I must chide you, Kate."

"Chide me, sire! For what?"

"You never wear the ring I gave you."

"I wear it now," she replied, showing it to him on her finger. "I treasure it beyond any of my jewels."

His suspicions were instantly removed, and, with a gracious smile, he said, "Have you no boon to ask from me, Kate, on this the eve of our bridal? What would you, sweetheart?"

"I lack nothing. But your Majesty's kindness emboldens me to address a petition to you, the granting of which will be the greatest favour you can confer upon me."

"A petition!" he exclaimed; "in whose behalf?"

"In behalf of one condemned to death for treason," she replied.

"Ha! would you supplicate for a traitor, Kate?"

"I would have our union sanctified by an act of mercy. He for whom I plead has been my bitter enemy, and for that very reason I would have you pardon him. I sue for Cromwell, sire! For my sake, spare him!"

"To ask the traitor's life proves the goodness of your heart, Kate; for you have said truly that he was your enemy, and had I kept him in his post, he might have worked you ill. I have received a penitent letter from him from his prison in the Tower, in which he prays for mercy in most abject terms."

"Show me the letter, sire—let me read it to you."

"I grieve to refuse aught, sweet Kate, especially at a time like this; but I must be firm."

"Mother of mercy, move his heart!" she cried, kneeling down upon the cushion, and raising her clasped hands towards the Madonna.

She was still in this attitude, with the King gazing at her, half disposed to yield, when Norfolk and Gardiner appeared at the door of the oratory.

They looked on in astonishment, wondering what had happened.

"You shall judge between the Lady Catherine and myself, my lords, and I will be guided by your decision," said Henry. "How think you?"—she would have me pardon Cromwell."

"Pardon that corrupt traitor!" cried the Duke, glancing angrily at her. "What means this madness?"

"I knew I should incur your displeasure, my lord," she rejoined. "But I would not have the unfortunate man sacrificed!"

"You know not what you ask!" cried Norfolk. "Cromwell is the vilest traitor that hath been known during his Majesty's whole reign, and hath been most justly condemned!"

"To show him mercy would be to incense the people, who cry for his blood!" said Gardiner.

"Here is the warrant for his execution, sire!" observed Norfolk to the King.

"You will not sign it, if you love me, sire!" cried Catherine, approaching him.

Henry turned aside his head.

"Desist from further solicitation, daughter," said Gardiner; "the King is inflexible."

"How know you that, my lord?" she cried. "Let him answer for himself. Speak, sire!"

"You put me to great pain, Kate," said Henry, regarding her. "But my determination is unalterable. I shall sign the warrant ere I sleep."

Norfolk and Gardiner exchanged looks of triumph.

From his place of concealment behind the arras, Dereham overheard the King's decision.

IX.

THE LAST MEETING BETWEEN CROMWELL AND CRANMER.

ATTAINTED and convicted of heresy and *lèse-majesté,* Cromwell had been condemned as a traitor and a heretic.

His enemies, as the Duke of Norfolk threatened, had proceeded against him by Bill of Attainder—a most iniquitous practice, which he himself had introduced.

By this illegal process, no proofs were required of the charges made against him. No witnesses were called, nor could he speak in his own defence.

Condemnation, after this mock trial, followed as a

matter of course; and it was left by the slavish Parliament to the King to deal with him as he thought fit, and either doom him to death by the headsman's axe on Tower Hill, or consign him to the stake at Smithfield.

From his prison in the Tower, Cromwell addressed several piteous letters to the King, written, as he himself stated, "with a trembling hand, and most sorrowful heart."

Fervently protesting that devotion to his royal master had been his ruling passion, he invoked heaven's vengeance upon his own head if had ever harboured a thought of treason. As he might have foreseen, these sad appeals for mercy were ineffectual.

Abandoned by all his friends, except Cranmer, the once powerful minister was left to languish in his prison without a word of consolation or sympathy.

His sufferings were aggravated by remorse. The groans and maledictions of those whom he had brought to a like fate, rang in his ears. His chamber was peopled with phantoms, and these dreadful visions scared away sleep.

A few days of this terrible mental torture did the work of years. When arrested at the Council-board, he had been strong and erect. Now he was an old man. His form was bent, his cheeks sunken, his eyes hollow, his hair white.

His time passed miserably. He did little else than pace to and fro within his narrow chamber, vainly trying to shut out the frightful objects that rose before him, incessantly bemoaning his hopeless fate, and inveighing bitterly against his enemies.

Cranmer visited him almost daily, prayed with

him, and strove to bring him to a better frame of mind; but with very indifferent success. The unhappy man frequently gave way to violent outbursts of rage and grief.

"Your Grace enjoins me to forgive my enemies," he said. "But how can I do so after the injuries they have inflicted upon me? The King trusted me, honoured me, ennobled me, enriched me. They have brought false charges against me, have procured my disgrace, have bereft me of my dignities, have confiscated my possessions, have condemned me unheard, and will bring me to the block, if mercy is not shown me. I were more than human if I could forgive them."

"Doubtless, your cross is hard to bear, my lord," said Cranmer; "but you must not sink beneath it. Your trials, though severe, will soon be over. Forget the injuries you have received, and think of the bliss in store for you."

All the response made by Cromwell was a groan.

On the last occasion they were destined to meet on earth, Cranmer found the unhappy prisoner somewhat more resigned; but he still railed against his enemies, and taxed the King with ingratitude.

"Never was servant more blindly obedient to a master than I have been to his Majesty," he said. "Yet what has been the reward of all my service?"

"My lord, you wot well that you might have maintained your post, had you not thwarted the King's inclinations," observed Cranmer.

"Ay, I have paid the penalty of my imprudence. But I thought to benefit our Church. Had he not repudiated Anne of Cleves, all had gone well. His fatal

passion for Catherine Howard has destroyed me, and endangered the Protestant party."

After a pause, he asked, "Is the affair consummated? Has he married her?"

"They were married privately yesterday at Winchester House, by Gardiner," replied Cranmer. "'Twill be a heavy blow to us. The new Queen may be harmless in herself, but she will have bad counsellors, and her influence over the King cannot fail to prove baneful."

"She will be a mere puppet in the hands of Norfolk and Gardiner," observed Cromwell. "They will strive to undo our work, and restore Popery and all its errors. One by one, the leaders of the Protestant party will be removed—your Grace among the first. Gardiner will never rest till he has compassed your destruction, as he has done mine. So long as Catherine Howard rules, so long will the Romanists be in the ascendancy. I have failed in preventing this ill-omened marriage. But it will be in your power at any time to dissolve it."

"How mean you, my lord?" inquired Cranmer.

"Seek out a certain Mary Lassells, who served the old Duchess of Norfolk, and who was—and, for aught I know, still is—in the new Queen's household. If properly questioned, this woman—Mary Lassells, you will mind the name—will give you some information on which you may act. You have helped to divorce three Queens—you may yet divorce a fourth."

"Methinks you are leaving me a legacy of vengeance, my lord," observed Cranmer.

"I am showing you how to defeat the designs of the enemies of our faith," replied Cromwell. "The hour may come—nay, *will* come, when you may be glad to

avail yourself of the weapon with which I have furnished you."

At this juncture, the massive door, which was bolted even during the Archbishop's visits, was unfastened, and Sir William Kingston, the Lieutenant of the Tower, entered the prison-chamber.

He bowed reverently to Cranmer, and with much sorrowful respect to the illustrious prisoner.

"I perceive, from your countenance, that you bring ill tidings, Sir William," remarked Cromwell, looking earnestly at him.

"You have guessed aright, my lord," replied the lieutenant. "Summon all your fortitude, I pray you. The death-warrant has just arrived. Your execution will take place to-morrow morning on Tower Hill."

"Heaven have mercy upon you!" exclaimed Cranmer.

"Then all hope is gone?" groaned Cromwell.

"My lord, you must prepare to meet your fate," said Kingston. "His Majesty is inflexible. He would not even listen to his bride, who besought your pardon."

"Did she intercede for me?" asked Cromwell.

"Most urgently, I am told, my lord; but, I lament to say, ineffectually. Perchance, she might have prevailed, had not the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester interposed."

"Heaven requite them!" exclaimed Cromwell, clasping his hands.

Then, suddenly starting to his feet, he seized Cranmer's arm, and whispered in his ear, "Forget what I have just told you. Spare her—'tis my dying request."

"Calm yourself, my lord, I entreat you," said the

Primate, fearing some imprudence on the part of the unhappy man. "I will attend to your injunctions."

"Enough!" cried Cromwell, sinking back in his chair. "I shall not have that guilt on my soul!" he mentally ejaculated.

While preparing to take his departure, Sir William Kingston inquired of the prisoner, in a tone of much feeling, if there was aught he could do for him.

"You can confer a great favour upon me, sir," replied Cromwell. "Here in this prison-chamber, I am disturbed by such dreadful thoughts, that I cannot pray. The shades of Exeter and Montague are ever before me. No sooner am I alone, than those ghastly shapes appear, and will not be dismissed."

"Shake off these superstitious terrors, my lord," said Cranmer, "and be yourself. Pray heartily, and all the phantoms created by your disordered imagination will disappear."

"If you are about to ask me to change your prison, my lord," said the lieutenant, "I grieve to say that I cannot comply. Here you must, perforce, remain to the last."

"You mistake me, good Sir William," rejoined Cromwell. "All I would ask of you is leave to perform my devotions for the last time privately within the sacred walls of St. John's Chapel, in the White Tower."

"I entreat you to grant the request, sir," urged Cranmer.

"Most willingly," replied the lieutenant. "You shall be taken to St. John's Chapel when you will, and pray there as long as you list."

"I humbly thank you," rejoined Cromwell, gratefully. "Since you considerately allow me to choose the hour, I

will go thither at midnight, that being the hour when I am most beset by these phantoms."

"You shall have your wish, my lord," said the lieutenant; "and it is a satisfaction to me that I can make your mind easier in any way. At midnight, you shall be conducted to the chapel. Meanwhile, I counsel you not to delay your preparations for the morrow. Heaven have you in its keeping!"

With this, he departed.

Cranmer remained for some time longer with the prisoner, earnestly exhorting him to withdraw his thoughts from earth, and to fix them on high.

Nor would he leave him until he had received the unhappy man's confession, and given him absolution. Then, embracing him affectionately, he bade him an eternal farewell.

X.

WHAT OCCURRED IN ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL IN THE WHITE TOWER.

THERE are two chapels in the Tower—one of which, standing at the north-west corner of the inner ward, is sufficiently well known: the other, and by far the more remarkable structure, is concealed in the very heart of the old donjon; and being somewhat difficult of access, and used, moreover, as a depositary for State records, is rarely seen.

This ancient chapel, justly considered one of the finest specimens of Norman architecture in the country, is in

an admirable state of preservation, although it is encumbered by presses, and its unrivalled columns are thickly coated with whitewash.

At the period of our history, it was reserved for the King, during his visits to the old palace in the Tower; but by special permission of the lieutenant, some of the more important prisoners were occasionally allowed to perform their devotions within it.

Henry's partiality for St. John's Chapel had prevented it from being desecrated by the Vicar-General. It was still as richly decked as a shrine. The altar was marvellously beautiful. The three windows were filled with stained glass, representing the Virgin and Child, the Holy Trinity, and St. John the Evangelist. Even the numerous saintly images, with the cross and rood, given by Henry the Third, had been allowed to remain.

It is now destitute of all ornament whatever, and can only interest from the severe simplicity of its architecture.

It was in this chapel, which he himself would have despoiled of its treasures, if he had been permitted, that Cromwell had obtained permission to perform his devotions at midnight.

For several hours after Cranmer's departure, the prisoner was wholly undisturbed. How he passed that interval we need not inquire.

When the gaoler entered his chamber with his evening meal, he found him leaning back in his chair, with his face covered by his hand, and thought he slumbered.

But the man had something to say; and having lighted the lamp that was placed upon the table, he touched his arm.

Upon this, Cromwell started up, and exclaimed, "What is it? Have you brought me the King's pardon?"

"Would I had, my lord," rejoined the gaoler. "But a Franciscan friar hath lately come to the Tower, and is most anxious to see you."

"A Franciscan friar!" exclaimed Cromwell reflecting. "What business can he have with me?"

"Most like, his business is to pray with your lordship," replied the gaoler; "but I would not admit him."

"Thou didst wrong, good Jerome. I would fain see him. Is he gone?"

"No, my lord. He is in the guard-chamber at the Bowyer Tower."

"Fetch him quickly, I pray thee!"

"I cannot bring him to your lordship without an order, and I do not think the lieutenant will grant him one."

"I shall not die in peace unless I see him," cried Cromwell. "I have ever found thee ready to serve me, good Jerome—serve me now. 'Tis the last favour I shall require of thee. Take this brooch—thou seest it is set with gems—and bring this friar to me."

The gaoler examined the brooch by the light of the lamp, and then, with a strangely significant smile, said, "I dare not bring the friar here, my lord. But you shall see him at St. John's Chapel at midnight. Sir William will not be there."

With this, he departed, leaving the prisoner in an indescribable state of restlessness and anxiety, which he endured until the grating of the bolts announced the gaoler's return.

When the door was thrown open by Jerome, a warder was seen standing without, bearing a torch.

"'Tis close upon midnight, my lord," said Jerome. "Are you ready to proceed to St. John's Chapel?"

"Quite ready," replied Cromwell, rising.

While the gaoler aided Cromwell to put on his gown, he whispered in his ear, "You will find him in the chapel."

Preceded by the torch-bearer, they then descended the short spiral staircase, and issued forth into the inner ward.

The night was dark, and the huge pile, towards which they were about to proceed, though close at hand, was scarcely distinguishable in the gloom.

Half a dozen arquebusiers were in waiting to escort the prisoner to the White Tower.

Just as the troop was put in motion, a deep bell tolled forth the hour of midnight. The whole fortress seemed buried in profound repose.

No other sound was heard, except the martial tramp of the halberdiers.

Sentinels there were at the walls and at the gates, but the inner court was deserted.

Presently, the torchlight flashed on the gray walls of the donjon, and on the steep flight of stone steps leading to the door.

At the foot of these steps the arquebusiers halted, while the prisoner entered with the gaoler and the torch-bearer.

Once within the strong walls of the White Tower, Cromwell was left to the sole custody of the gaoler.

The warder remained in a small guard-room near the entrance, where a couple of halberdiers were lying fast asleep on a bench, and having relinquished his torch to Jerome, sat down on a stool beside them.

As the prisoner and the gaoler tracked a stone corridor, a cowled figure glided before them, with noiseless footsteps, and preceded them up a spiral staircase.

Then it disappeared.

Jerome and his companion marched on in silence. Not a word was exchanged between them till they reached the entrance of the chapel.

The door was standing ajar, intimating that some one had recently passed through it.

"Go in, my lord," said Jerome. "I must lock the door, but I will open it when you desire to come forth. You will find the friar inside."

As Cromwell entered, the door was locked behind him.

The tapers were lighted at the altar, but their gleam being intercepted by the massive pillars, the aisles were left in gloom.

Cromwell paused for a moment within the arcade, for his strength suddenly forsook him, and leaned against one of the ponderous columns for support.

On recovering, he passed into the centre of the chapel.

Near the altar, which, as we have said, was lighted up, stood the Franciscan friar, with his cowl drawn over his features.

He was aware of Cromwell's approach, but, not being sure that he was alone, he remained motionless for a moment; and then, throwing back his hood, disclosed the countenance of Francis Dereham.

A short, sad greeting took place between them.

"I have performed my promise, my lord," said Dereham. "I told you I would come to you in the Tower; and, though I failed to obtain admittance to your prison, I have contrived a meeting with you here."

"Have you aught to tell me, Dereham?" asked Cromwell, anxiously.

"Only this, my lord—and it will gladden you to hear it. You shall baulk the tyrant. You shall not die on the scaffold."

Cromwell's emotion at these words well-nigh overpowered him, and Dereham paused for a moment before proceeding.

"You shall not enter your prison again, my lord," he said. "I have planned your escape. Disguised in this friar's habit, you will be able to pass through the guard unquestioned. Haste towards the Bloody Tower; but before reaching it, you will encounter a warder. Do not fear him. He is a confederate. He will get you out of the fortress, and will conduct you to a spot on the banks of the river where you will find a boat. My trusty African, Mourzouk, will be in charge of the skiff, and will convey you with all speed to a place of safety."

"A well-contrived plan!" observed Cromwell, "But what will become of you?"

"Think not of me, my lord!" cried Dereham. "Think only of your own preservation. I can take care of myself. I have secured the aid of the gaoler, Jerome. There is a secret outlet from this donjon, with which he is acquainted. Before to-morrow night I will rejoin you. Imagine the King's wrath when he hears of your escape! He will be frantic. I would not be the messenger to bring him the news. You cannot laugh now, but 'twill be matter of mirth to you hereafter."

Cromwell looked bewildered and irresolute. Dereham became alarmed.

"Time presses, my lord!" he cried, untying his girdle. "Put on this robe, and give me your gown."

"Alas!" exclaimed Cromwell, despairingly; "I have not strength for the effort."

"For heaven's sake, make the attempt, my lord!" cried Dereham. "Your life and liberty are at stake. Jerome will help you. He is bribed. If you can but hold yourself erect, and walk firmly as you pass the guard, you will excite no suspicion."

"I cannot do it," groaned Cromwell. "A hand I cannot resist holds me back. 'Tis vain to struggle against fate."

"I thought you had firmer nerves, my lord," said Dereham. "But though you refuse to save yourself by flight, you may yet avoid an ignominious death. This phial contains a subtle poison, a few drops of which will quickly place you beyond reach of Henry's vengeance."

"I thank you for your devotion to me, Dereham, but I cannot profit by it. I must make atonement for my offences. Heaven wills that I, who have brought so many to the scaffold, should die on the scaffold myself. Of all my followers, you are the only one who has remained true to me in my adversity. I have no means of rewarding your fidelity, but I can give you a piece of counsel. Act upon it, I beseech you. Seek not revenge for any wrong you have endured from Catherine Howard. Banish her from your breast. Cross not the King, or you will perish, as I shall perish, on the block. And now farewell for ever!"

While Dereham was slowly quitting the chapel, he looked back, and perceived that Cromwell had fallen on his knees before the altar, and was praying fervently.

A tap against the door caused the gaoler immediately to open it.

Without allowing him time to ask any questions,

Dereham informed him that the plan of evasion was frustrated by the prisoner's irresolution.

"'Tis useless to reason with him," he said. "He is obstinately bent on dying on the scaffold. Get me out of the White Tower as quickly as you can, and then take him back to his prison-chamber."

XI.

HOW THE LORD CROMWELL WAS BEHEADED ON TOWER HILL.

Morn came—a morn perfectly in unison with the dreadful tragedy about to be enacted on Tower Hill.

Partially robed in mist, the huge donjon of the fortress looked sterner and more sombre than usual, and the gray ramparts frowned gloomily upon the crowd that began to collect at an early hour round the scaffold.

Executions were of too frequent occurrence in the terrible days of Henry the Eighth to cause much sensation; but Cromwell's execution could not fail to attract a large concourse. He was hated by the citizens, who looked upon him as the author of all the tyrannical and oppressive measures to which they had been subjected. They rejoiced in his downfall; and if he had received a pardon from the King, or had contrived to effect his escape through the instrumentality of Dereham, a dangerous popular outbreak would assuredly have taken place.

Never before had such a crowd been seen on Tower Hill. Protestant and Papist were equally embittered against the fallen minister. By the former, his great services to the Reformation were overlooked in their

anger at the heavy imposts he had lately inflicted upon them; by the latter, he was denounced as a traitor—an enemy to the people—a sacramentary, and a heretic.

Mingled with the crowd were a great number of poor monks, who had been driven from the monasteries on their dissolution, and they increased the general excitement by their vehement harangues. They spoke of Cromwell's sacrilegious acts—of the shrines he had desecrated and despoiled—of the multitudes of holy men he had reduced to beggary—of the mischief he had done to religion; and they dwelt on their own individual hardships, which were attributable to him. Divine justice had at length overtaken the offender, and he would die as he deserved, amid universal execration.

Such were the elements of which the vast assemblage was composed. Differ as they might on matters of faith, they all agreed on one point—Cromwell had been justly condemned.

Two large galleries were reared on the brow of the hill, near the scaffold, and long before the hour appointed for the dread ceremonial all the seats in these structures were occupied, except a space in front set apart for the members of the Council, and other important personages.

Draped in black, protected by barriers, and surrounded by halberdiers, the scaffold produced a striking effect.

A double line of rails, running from the Bulwark Gate of the fortress to the place of execution, ensured a passage for the prisoner and his escort.

Inside the rails mounted arquebusiers were stationed at short intervals to keep back the crowd, and the precaution was not unnecessary.

As yet, no one was upon the scaffold, except the headsman's assistant, Botolph—a broad-shouldered, red-headed varlet, clad in a buff jerkin; and as he had completed his preparations, adjusted the block, and strewn the blood-stained boards with straw, he was lounging against the rails, and jesting with the halberdiers.

Botolph had assisted at many executions, but had never seen such a crowd before. Viewed from the scaffold, the sight was extraordinary. Not merely the whole area of Tower Hill was filled with people, but the ramparts and gates commanding the place of execution were covered with spectators.

Within the fortress the passing-bell was ringing, and it continued to toll till all was over. But the solemn sound could scarcely be heard amid the ceaseless roar of the multitude.

Some confusion was caused by the arrival of the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs. They were on horseback, and were preceded by the mounted civic guard, who cleared the way for them through the dense masses.

Shortly afterwards the crowd was again disturbed by the Council, conspicuous among whom were Cromwell's enemies, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Wriothesley. These were lustily cheered, being accounted the friends of the people.

At length, the rolling of a muffled drum was heard, and all eyes were turned towards the Bulwark Gate, from which the advanced guard of the melancholy procession—halberdiers marching four abreast—now issued.

Next came the Lieutenant of the Tower, on horseback; then more halberdiers; and then Mauger, the

headsman, walking by himself, with the fatal axe upon his shoulder, and his features concealed by a hideous black mask.

Then came the unfortunate minister, to witness whose sad end so many thousands had assembled.

Beside him walked the Chaplain of the Tower, a venerable man, who was reciting the prayers for the dying.

Then followed the rear-guard.

Cromwell was robed in the black velvet gown, furred with jennet, which he had habitually worn, and had a black velvet cap on his head. He was so much changed that those who had known him well, scarcely recognised him.

But his white looks, pallid features, and bent form excited no compassion. His appearance was greeted with terrible outcries. The monks pressed forward on either side of the rails, and stretching out their hands as if they would tear him in pieces, fiercely anathematized him, and doomed him to endless torment.

Vainly did the halberdiers try to silence them, and thrust them back. Their fury could not be restrained.

Nor were the citizens less violent. All the offences laid to the unhappy man's charge were enumerated, and the long catalogue of those he had been instrumental in bringing to the block, was re-echoed again and again.

The venerable chaplain appealed to his persecutors for compassion, and held up the cross to them.

Cromwell bore the storm to which he was exposed courageously, and then resolutely averting his gaze from his tormentors, and fixing it upon the crucifix held out by the chaplain, he appeared to become insensible to the outcries.

But he had another and yet more trying ordeal to undergo.

A small open space had been kept clear by the halberdiers near the scaffold. Within it stood his chief enemy, the Duke of Norfolk, conversing with Sir William Kingston, who had just dismounted.

Never did Cromwell display more dignity than on this occasion. After he had been formally delivered to the Sheriffs by the lieutenant, Norfolk advanced and bowed gravely to him, but he did not return the salutation.

Looking haughtily and sternly at his enemy, he marched on, attended by the Sheriffs, to the scaffold.

Before he reached the steps, he was overtaken by Sir William Kingston.

"His Grace the Duke of Norfolk would fain say a word to you, my lord," observed the lieutenant.

"He should have come to me before," replied Cromwell. "I have no time now for talk with any man. If he seeks my forgiveness, tell him he has it."

Declining all offers of assistance from the Sheriffs, be then ascended the scaffold with a firm footstep.

Mauger had preceded him, and was standing beside the block, leaning upon his axe. The venerable Chaplain of the Tower was likewise there, crucifix in hand.

No sooner did Cromwell appear on the scaffold, than the fierce clamours of the crowd instantaneously subsided.

The sudden silence was awful.

Sir William Kingston then stepped up and said, "My lord, if you desire to address the people, they will listen to you. Their anger is past."

Thereupon, Cromwell advanced to the front of the scaffold, so that he could be distinctly seen, and for a few moments calmly surveyed the vast assemblage. Not a murmur was heard.

While he spoke, all eyes were fixed upon him, all ears strained to catch his words.

He did not attempt to question the justice of his sentence, but earnestly besought his hearers to bear record that he died in the Catholic faith, not doubting any of its articles, or any of its sacraments.

"Many have slandered me," he said, "and have reported that I have maintained evil opinions. That is false. Wrong I have done, but treason I have never committed. Where I have erred, it has been from excess of zeal for the King's welfare. I have served him faithfully. Pray for me, I beseech you, and be sure that to the last I shall never waver in my faith."

The address caused much surprise, and the Romanists declared that the Protestant Vicar-General had pronounced his recantation.

As he cast a valedictory look around, his eye alighted upon Dereham, whom he had not hitherto noticed, but who was standing immediately beneath him, inside the barriers.

For a moment he gazed fixedly at him; and how much of caution did that brief parting glance convey! It dwelt for ever on Dereham's memory—but, alas! he heeded not the warning.

Cromwell then retired, and with the lieutenant's aid divested himself of his velvet robe, appearing in a doublet and hose of black velvet. After bidding farewell to the lieutenant, who was greatly moved, he knelt down by the block, and joined in fervent prayer

with the chaplain. His last act of devotion was to press his lips to the crucifix, which was extended towards him.

Mauger then advanced, and bending the knee, solicited his forgiveness.

"I will not only forgive thee, but thank thee, friend," said Cromwell, "if thou will give me a quick death."

"I will not fail you, my lord," replied Mauger. "No one ever complained of my want of skill."

"Perchance not," said Cromwell.

He then disposed himself to die, but refused to have his eyes bandaged.

His neck being fitted to the block, he called out almost immediately to the executioner to do his devoir.

Scarcely was the injunction given, than the axe descended, and the head of the ill-fated minister rolled upon the boards.

Mauger instantly seized it, and holding it up, streaming with gore, to the assemblage, called out, in a loud voice, "Behold the head of a traitor!"

END OF THE SECOND BOOK.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CATHERINE HOWARD.

I.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN CATHERINE AND CRANMER.

HENRY THE EIGHTH, as already intimated, was privately married to his fifth consort, Catherine Howard, at Winchester House; the nuptial benediction being pronounced by Gardiner.

No public announcement of the marriage was made for a month, when orders were issued that Catherine should be prayed for at all churches throughout the realm as Queen of England. At the same time, she was formally presented to the Court as his consort by the King.

Their honeymoon (if so it may be styled) had been passed by the royal pair in comparative seclusion—partly at Greenwich Palace, partly at Hampton Court.

Incomparably the loveliest of Henry's spouses—not excepting even her cousin, Anne Boleyn—Catherine looked more charming after marriage than before.

The magnificent attire which, as Queen, she had begun to assume, served to heighten her attractions, and she now looked resplendently beautiful. Acting upon Lady Rochford's artful counsel, she exerted all her fascinations to rivet the King's affections, and suc-

ceeded so well, that the shrewdest courtiers began to think that the capricious monarch was fast bound at last.

During the period of seclusion to which we have referred, Henry could not bear to be separated from his lovely young bride, even for an hour. Such time as he was compelled to devote to affairs of state appeared irksome to him, and he delegated everything he could to the Duke of Norfolk, who, since Cromwell's fall, had become Prime Minister. No masks, no balls, no entertainments of any kind were given.

That Catherine found this sort of life somewhat wearisome, is probable. But she seemed perfectly happy. Her manner was infinitely gayer than it had been, and her vivacity—whether feigned or not—enchanted the King. He believed she loved him; and if he was duped, what matter?

Adrian Culpepper still enjoyed as much of the King's favour as ever. As the Queen's relative, he had an additional claim on Henry's regard; and it seemed certain, if Catherine exerted her influence in his behalf, that he must rise to distinction. But Lady Rochford counselled prudence in regard to him.

Not from choice, but in obedience to the King's behests, Adrian was in constant attendance upon the Queen during the honeymoon. How much he suffered may be conceived, since his passion for her was not extinguished. He had to be ever on his guard, lest he should betray himself. As he possessed a good voice, he was sometimes called upon to accompany the Queen when she sang to the King and the few guests who were admitted to their private assemblies.

The bridal month being over, Henry deemed it ex-

pedient that his subjects should be made acquainted with his marriage.

Accordingly, it was announced, in the manner we have described, and a grand reception took place at Hampton Court, at which the foreign ambassadors and all the most important personages of the Court were presented to the Queen.

The walls of the presence-chamber, in which the ceremony occurred, were hung with tapestry of gold and silver, and rich tissues of various colours; and when the vast hall was filled with nobles and highborn dames, all splendidly attired, and glittering with jewels, the effect was magnificent beyond description—the most charming figure in the gorgeous picture being the young Queen herself.

At the upper end of the chamber was a canopy of state, on which was embroidered in pearl, the words VIVAT HENRICUS OCTAVUS. Beneath this canopy, which was elevated by several steps, above the assemblage, stood Catherine and her royal consort. The Queen's robe was of cloth of silver, raised, thickly studded with gems, and she wore a diamond-shaped head-dress adorned with orient pearls. On her sleeve was worked this device, expressive of her devotion to the King:—*Non autre volonté que la sienne.*

But it was not the splendour of her attire, but her marvellous beauty and grace, that enchanted the beholders. Her eyes shone brighter than the diamonds on her collar, and Henry was enchanted with the admiration she excited.

Her household had just been formed, and the King took care it should comprehend all the most distinguished dames of the Court. Foremost in the list was his own

niece, the Lady Margaret Douglas. After her may be named his daughter-in-law, the Duchess of Richmond, who was likewise cousin to the Queen. Next, we may mention the Duchess of Suffolk, the Countess of Sussex, the Lady Howard, and the Lady Clinton. The ladies of the Privy Chamber were the Countess of Rutland, the Lady Edgecombe, the Lady Boynton, and last, but not least in the Queen's regard, her confidante and favourite, Lady Rochford.

We do not deem it necessary to particularize the Maids of Honour, but they had all been chosen for their personal attractions. As they were grouped around the Queen, they formed a perfect galaxy of beauty.

On the upper step of the canopy, immediately below the Queen, stood the youthful Princess Elizabeth. As the daughter of her ill-fated cousin, Anne Boleyn, Catherine manifested great affection for the charming young Princess, which the latter warmly returned.

Again the Duke of Norfolk saw a niece upon the throne, with every prospect, as it seemed, of retaining her position. He was not without misgiving; but if no untoward circumstances occurred—which it would be his business to prevent—Catherine's extraordinary influence must continue. It was perceptible to all how much the King doted upon her. Moreover, she had no such antecedents as Anne Boleyn, so there was no cause for alarm. Everything, therefore, disposed the Duke to augur favourably of the future.

Some there were present who formed a very different conclusion, and confidently predicted that the young Queen's star, now in the ascendant, would suddenly decline—perhaps, be quenched in blood. It was difficult to gaze at her, as she stood there in all the pride of her

youth and matchless beauty, to witness the King's devotion to her, and think that such might be her fate. Those who thought so were better judges than Norfolk, and had good reason for their opinion. True, they were her enemies—opposed to her because they deemed she would work mischief to their cause.

The persons to whom we have just alluded as being so strongly hostile to her, were Cranmer, and the two great leaders of the Protestant party—Audeley, the Chancellor, and the Earl of Hertford.

If smiles could have turned their hearts, they would have been won. But their animosity was not to be thus disarmed. They could not tolerate a Romanist Queen.

Later on in the day, a sumptuous banquet was given, when the tables were garnished with the magnificent gold and silver plate which Cardinal Wolsey had been compelled to yield up to the King.

The banquet was succeeded by a masque and music. While this entertainment was going on, Norfolk and Gardiner withdrew from the assemblage into a recess, where they could confer upon certain matters, in carrying which the Queen's influence would be of vital importance to them. Norfolk undertook to secure her co-operation.

Just as they came forth after their discussion, the three great Protestant leaders, to whom we have referred, passed them, and glances of hate were exchanged.

Norfolk could not restrain himself; but fixing his eye upon Cranmer as he spoke, observed, in a tone loud enough to be heard by the Primate, "One of the Queen's enemies is gone. The worst remains. Ere long, he shall be removed."

Cranmer did not doubt that the menace was intended for him; and though he affected to deride it, he resolved to take immediate measures to defeat any scheme that might be forming against him.

The masque was over; and Henry, who was fond of cards, as we know, had quitted his lovely consort to play at primero with the Duke of Suffolk and Marillac, the French Ambassador.

Judging the moment favourable for his design, Cranmer separated himself from his companions, and, passing through the brilliant throng of nobles and dames, approached the Queen, and made her a profound obeisance.

Those nearest her drew back respectfully as the Primate advanced. Catherine, who deemed it politic to stand well with the leaders of the Protestant party, received him with a gracious smile.

"I am glad to find your Grace still here," she said. "I fancied you had retired some time ago. These light diversions cannot be much to your taste."

"I could not retire without reiterating my heartfelt wishes for your Highness's happiness and prosperity," he rejoined. "May you long continue to occupy the exalted position to which you have been raised! And may the affection which the King, your husband, bears you be strengthened!"

"I thank your Grace for the benediction!" cried Catherine.

"I have already rendered homage to you as Queen, madam," continued the Archbishop; "but, as a woman, you have equal claims to my respect. You have given proof of the goodness of your heart, and the rare gener-

osity of your nature, in interceding for the life of one whom you had been taught to regard as an enemy."

"Alas! my lord, I shall ever regret that my intercession was not successful!" she exclaimed.

"It will, at least, be a satisfaction to your Highness to learn that the unfortunate Lord Cromwell was profoundly sensible of your goodness. While speaking of him, I may mention that he charged me with a singular injunction."

The peculiar significance given to the words caused Catherine to look at him.

"It in some degree concerns your Highness," pursued the Archbishop, lowering his voice almost to a whisper as he proceeded. "He bade me seek out a certain Mary Lassells, belonging to your Highness's household."

Catherine with difficulty repressed an exclamation.

The Archbishop perceived the impression he had produced, and went on,

"This woman, the Lord Cromwell stated, could afford me important information, which might be used as a weapon—should one be needed—against my adversaries. I have done nothing as yet; but I have been threatened to-night with the Vicar-General's fate, and must therefore take means to ensure my safety. Have I your Highness's permission to see this Mary Lassells?"

"There is no such person in my household," replied Catherine, coldly.

"Still she may be in the palace," observed Cranmer. "I trust I shall not offend your Highness by making inquiries respecting her?"

"I will make inquiries myself," said Catherine; "and send her to your Grace, if I discover her."

"I have neglected to state that the woman has

been in the service of the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk. Perchance your Highness may recollect her? But I perceive that I trouble you, and will say no more."

"Certes, your Grace has chosen a strange time to put these questions to me," observed the Queen. "At a more fitting season, I will confer with you on the matter. Meanwhile, you need have no apprehension of your enemies."

"That assurance from your Highness is sufficient," replied the Archbishop.

He had just made his obeisance, and was about to retire, when Henry came up.

The King appeared in high good humour, and was accompanied by the Duke of Norfolk and Marillac.

"Why so grave, sweet Kate?" he cried. "Hath his Grace been admonishing you?"

"Nothing he has said will be lost upon me, sire," rejoined the Queen. "I will recount it all to your Majesty, anon."

"Nay, I care not to hear it," said the King, laughing. "But I am glad to find you are reconciled to his Grace."

"There was never any enmity between us, sire—at least, on my part," said Catherine; "and I trust your Majesty will allow me to prove to the Archbishop how truly I am his friend."

"By St. Mary, Kate, since such is your wish, you shall not lack the opportunity," cried Henry.

"I have just been extolling the Queen's goodness of heart, sire," said Cranmer; "and she now furnishes fresh evidence of it. Heaven has bestowed a consort on your Majesty as rich in all excellent qualities as she is in personal graces."

Bowing profoundly to them both, he then withdrew, well satisfied with what he had done.

"By my life, Kate, you have made a courtier of the Archbishop!" cried Henry, laughing. "Take heed he does not make a convert of you to the new doctrines. I trow he has some such design. But you look fatigued. Shall we retire?"

Catherine gladly assented, bidding good night to all around, and good-naturedly desiring that the festivities might not be checked by their departure.

Lady Rochford had watched the interview between Catherine and the Archbishop with curiosity, not unmingled with anxiety, for she plainly perceived that the Queen was troubled. She attended Catherine when she withdrew; and no sooner were they closeted together than she eagerly asked for an explanation. On receiving it, she was filled with uneasiness.

The risk of discovery was, indeed, great. Notwithstanding Catherine's denial, Mary Lassells was still in her service. But she must be removed without delay, and Lady Rochford charged herself with the task.

She encountered unexpected difficulties. Mary Lassells would not be dismissed. Neither threats nor entreaties would induce her to depart, and it was impossible, under the circumstances, to resort to force.

So the Queen and her confidante were obliged to submit, trusting that the obstinate woman would make no revelations if she should be interrogated by the Archbishop. Cranmer, however, seemed disposed to let the matter drop.

II.

HAMPTON COURT.

THE palace of Hampton Court, built by Cardinal Wolsey, and bestowed by him on the rapacious monarch, who set his greedy eyes upon it, was far more magnificent at the period of which we treat than it is at the present day. Internally, it was greatly altered, and by no means improved, by William the Third and Mary; and, by their order, many of the fine old apartments, so interesting from historical associations, were demolished and rebuilt, but with far inferior taste.

How many rooms were thus destroyed will be apparent from the fact that nearly three hundred silk beds were set up by the princely Cardinal for the accommodation of his guests. All the rich furniture of the palace, all its splendid hangings and tapestry, all its gold and silver plate, were delivered by Wolsey to the King.

Vast as it was, the palace was not large enough for Henry. He made considerable additions to it; but these were in harmony with the original design of the edifice. At this time, it possessed five spacious courts, three of them with fountains in the midst, and surrounded by noble buildings.

Whether from the incomparable beauty of its site, or the magnificence of its design, no palace in England was so much admired by foreigners as Hampton Court. Nothing was wanting to it. Its gardens were exquisitely laid out in grand terrace-walks, adorned with

vases and statues, while marble fountains added to their beauty.

The gardens then extended almost to the banks of the river, and the royal barge was always in readiness for a water excursion. The park was well stocked with deer, and contiguous to the palace was a tennis-court, to which the King daily repaired for recreation.

All the apartments, as we have said, were richly furnished, and some of the larger chambers were hung with the most costly tapestry. A small chapel, in which Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour had performed their devotions, and where Catherine now prayed, was a perfect gem. The long galleries were adorned with pictures.

This sumptuous palace was generally selected by Henry as a summer residence, for which it was admirably adapted. When he brought his young consort thither, its groves and bowers were in full beauty; and if her heart had been free from care, she must have been delighted with the place.

If regal state could have made her happy, she might have been so now. Splendid apparel, and magnificent ornaments, diamond necklaces, and girdles studded with gems, had been presented to her by the King. She gave audiences to the foreign ambassadors, and constant receptions to the Court. Grand entertainments took place daily. But banquets, pageants, balls, and masques, afforded her no distraction.

We have mentioned the great ladies who had been chosen by the King to form her household. Willingly would she have dispensed with them. She had a whole host of ushers, yeomen of the chambers, and pages, in

constant attendance upon them. Far rather would she have been without them.

Amid her grandeur, she often sighed for the dull old mansion at Lambeth. The tester of her superb couch had been worked by Anne Boleyn, and the knowledge of this fact often chased away her slumbers, or gave her terrible dreams.

Yet she did not allow her anxiety to appear. Only when alone with Lady Rochford was she despondent. At other times, she was full of vivacity, and her remarkable fascination of manner was acknowledged by all who were permitted to approach her.

If Catherine was a prey to secret care, her royal husband was full of contentment. He had no suspicion of the real state of her feelings, and was troubled with no jealousy. So happy was he, that his gusts of rage were less frequent than before.

On the formation of the Queen's household, Adrian Culpepper was appointed one of her gentleman ushers, and was consequently brought into dangerous proximity with her. Though he struggled hard against it, his insane passion once more obtained the mastery over him. For her sake as well as his own, he ought to have resigned his post. But he could not break the spell that bound him.

Gifted with far greater powers of discernment than the King, he had divined the secret of Catherine's heart. He perceived that she was unhappy. But only by his looks could he express sympathy. Though constantly in attendance, he could never find an opportunity of exchanging a word with her in private. At last, after many entreaties, he prevailed upon Lady Rochford to obtain him the interview he so greatly desired.

Catherine was in the habit of going, unattended, to her confidante's apartment, which adjoined her own. One evening, she proceeded thither as usual, and, to her surprise, found only Adrian. She was about to summon Lady Rochford, who had retired into an inner chamber, but he prevented her.

"Grant me a few moments, madam," he said, in an imploring tone, which she could not resist. "At all hazards I have sought this interview, to tell you how deeply I feel for you. I cannot bear to see you suffer thus."

"You are mistaken, Adrian," she replied; "I do not suffer. I ought not indeed to allow you to use such language to me; but I pardon you on account of your devotion to me."

"Alas, madam!" he rejoined; "you may impose on others, but you cannot impose on me. I can read your heart. I know you are unhappy—very unhappy!"

Catherine remained silent for a few moments, and then said, "I cannot contradict you, Adrian. I am very unhappy, but I trust no one but yourself has detected my secret grief."

"All believe you happy, madam," he rejoined. "There is not one person on earth who does not believe you have been governed by ambition, and that in mounting the throne, you have obtained the grand object at which you aimed. None suppose you have been disappointed. How can they? Your royal husband adores you. For you he has tamed his savage nature, and turned himself into a devoted lover, eager to gratify your slightest wish. Never before was he so subjugated. Your ascendancy over him is matter of astonishment to the whole Court. Neither Anne Boleyn nor Jane Seymour possessed such

sway. Yet with all this, I can perceive that you are far from happy. It may be a relief to you to confide your grief to me. You may do so safely."

"I know it, Adrian," she replied. "There is, indeed, a canker at my heart, that consumes me. Whatever my dreams of regal splendour may have been, the reality is nothing. I have attained a giddy position, from which I may at any moment be hurled. I am filled with terror, Adrian, because I perceive the sword suspended over my head. Even at the most brilliant entertainments, and when joyous music is sounding in my ears, all becomes gloomy. I see Anne Boleyn amid the courtly throng; and a low, warning voice, inaudible to others, whispers, 'I sat upon the throne you occupy. The King doted upon me, as he now dotes on you. Nevertheless, he doomed me to the block. Beware!' Oh, 'tis horrible, Adrian!" she exclaimed, with a convulsive shudder.

"Dismiss these thoughts, madam," he cried, trying to calm her. "The King is inconstant, but his love for you will last. You have far greater hold on his affections than Anne Boleyn possessed."

"I have a presentiment that I shall share her fate. Listen to me, Adrian. Ever since I have been in this palace, where there are so many memories of her—ever since I have prayed in her chapel and slept in her couch, she has been constantly before me. To none, save to Lady Rochford and yourself, dare I confess my secret terrors. I put on a semblance of gaiety. Were I to appear sad, the King would doubt me. But I cannot wear this mask for ever. Some day it will fall off, and then the woful countenance beneath it will be revealed. I envy the poor repudiated Princess of Cleves. *She* has escaped—but I shall never escape."

"Do not despair, madam," cried Adrian. "All will yet be well!"

"No—no—no! I cannot hope it. I once was happy, Adrian—but it seems years ago. Oh, that those blissful days could return! Oh, that I could once again be the light-hearted Catherine Howard!"

In the paroxysm of grief that ensued, and with the recollection of earlier days before her, she flung herself passionately into Adrian's arms, and wept upon his shoulder.

"You will not abandon me?" she exclaimed, raising her head, and looking wistfully in his face.

"Never!" he cried, fervently. "My life is yours! Command it!"

So engrossed were they with each other, that neither remarked that some one was watching them.

It was Mary Lassells, who had softly entered the room.

A singular smile played upon the countenance of the spy.

The Queen was the first to perceive her. Disengaging herself from Adrian's embrace, she started back, and exclaimed, "You here, Lassells?"

"Ay, madam," rejoined the other, in a tone that proclaimed the consciousness of the power she had gained. "I now understand why you desired to get rid of me. 'Twas not fear lest I should be interrogated by Archbishop Cranmer, but that you might meet your lover with less risk."

"Peace, woman!" cried Adrian. "Do not dare to put a false construction on what you have seen."

Mary Lassells laughed defiantly.

"What construction would the King put upon the

meeting, were he to hear of it?" she rejoined. "What would he have done had he been in my place, and seen what I have seen? You know full well what would have happened, without my telling you."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Adrian. "Dare to breathe a word against the Queen's honour, and I will kill you."

And he looked as if he would have put his threat into instant execution.

"Do not harm her, Adrian," cried Catherine.

"I am not afraid of him, madam," said Lassells, resolutely. "Neither need you be afraid of me. I ought, methinks, to be trusted, seeing that my fidelity has been tried."

"You *are* trusted, Lassells," cried Catherine, with an imploring look.

"Then let there be no further talk of my dismissal," was the insolent rejoinder.

"You shall tarry with me as long as you like," said the Queen. "You shall rise in my household, if you will but demean yourself properly, and keep a strict guard upon your tongue."

"Your Highness shall have no cause to complain of me. My temper is hasty, as you know; and if I have said ought to offend you, I humbly entreat forgiveness."

"Enough!" cried Catherine. "Now be gone!"

As Lassells quitted the room, Lady Rochford issued from the inner chamber.

"What is this?" she inquired.

The Queen told her.

"'Tis unlucky that she found Adrian here," returned Lady Rochford. "But you need fear no indiscretion on her part. Self-interest will keep her silent."

"I shall never forgive myself if mischief ensues," said Adrian.

"To prevent all chance of it," observed Lady Rochford to the Queen, "your Highness must return instantly to your apartments. I will attend you thither."

"It has been a sad pleasure to me to converse with you, Adrian," said Catherine to him. "But there must be no more meetings between us."

"Not with my consent, nor in my rooms," observed Lady Rochford. "Come, madam. Each moment increases the risk. Stir not hence till I return," she added to Adrian.

Before leaving, Catherine gave him her hand, which he pressed devotedly to his lips. She then disappeared with her confidante.

III.

CRANMER REMONSTRATES WITH CATHERINE.

After a month's sojourn at Hampton Court, the King and his lovely bride removed to Windsor Castle, where the festivities were continued.

All the apartments in the Castle were filled with noble guests. Banquets and grand entertainments were daily given. Jousts were held in the upper ward, and prizes bestowed by the young Queen—the chief prize being gained by Adrian Culpepper.

Henry gave himself up to ease and enjoyment. Not a care troubled him. His own dominions were tranquil

at the time, and the clouds that seemed gathering in France and Germany had passed away.

Above all, his domestic happiness appeared perfectly secured. In his eyes, Catherine was faultless. Far from diminishing, his love for her increased.

And she was happier than she had been at Hampton Court. At Windsor Castle, she was under less restraint, and could converse more freely with Adrian. In the hawking parties in the Home Park, he carried her favourite falcon. When the King hunted in the forest, Adrian was always in attendance upon her; and it sometimes chanced, during a lengthened chase, that she was outstripped by deer and hounds. She was then left to his sole charge.

No remark could be made, for Lady Rochford was ever with her. As to Adrian, his conduct was too cautious to excite the King's jealousy or suspicion. Thus Catherine, having greater freedom, grew more reconciled to her position. The terrors that had assailed her vanished by degrees. The future brightened, and hope returned to her breast.

Alas! she was in greater jeopardy than she imagined. Already, she had made numerous and powerful enemies. Everywhere, the partisans of the old religion monopolized the royal favour, while their opponents were neglected or degraded. The spirit of persecution reared its head. Several important persons, obnoxious to Norfolk and Gardiner, had been imprisoned, and some executed.

These severities were attributed to the young Queen's baneful influence over the infatuated King. She was striving to bring him back to Rome. He must be delivered from this bondage. Better have back the Lutheran Princess than tolerate this favourer of Papistry and idola-

try. Such were the sentiments of the leaders of the Protestant party.

A strong remonstrance on the impolicy of her conduct was addressed to the young Queen by Cranmer. He solicited a private audience, and having obtained it, thus lifted up his warning voice:—

"Gracious madam, I pray you pardon the boldness with which I am about to speak. That you are swayed by the counsels of the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishop of Winchester is evident; and that the King, in his turn, is swayed by you is likewise manifest. Your influence with your royal husband is unbounded; and if beneficially exercised, all his loyal and loving subjects will pray for its continuance. Arrest this sad persecution. All who openly defend the reformed religion are stricken without pity. Not long ago they were favoured and protected. Whence this change? The answer given by all Protestants is that you, madam—a Catholic Queen—have caused it! 'Tis said to be your fixed determination to extirpate heresy from the land. If it be so, you will fail. The new doctrines have taken too deep root to be forcibly torn up. There will be no lack of martyrs, for all true Protestants will rejoice to seal their faith with their blood. Woe, then, to those who have caused this affliction! Heaven will avenge its saints! But I trust things will not arrive at such a grievous pass. You can prevent it. Listen not to evil counsellors. Incline the King's heart to compassion—to justice. So shall you remain long upon the throne!"

Though much alarmed by the Archbishop's address, which was pronounced in stern tones, Catherine found courage to reply,—

"Your Grace does me injustice. I have not caused

the persecution of which you complain. I have expressed no determination to extirpate heresy, nor have I conceived any such design. Like every good Catholic, I should rejoice that the sheep that have strayed from the fold should return to it, but I would not compel them to do so. When you tax the King's ministers with undue severity, you forget the provocation which the Romanists have received—you forget how much they suffered in the time of the late Vicar-General. These sharp measures are but reprisals. I lament as much as your Grace that a better understanding cannot be arrived at between the contending factions, but I am powerless to accomplish it."

"Say not so, madam," rejoined Cranmer. "You can do anything you please with the King."

"Were that literally true," observed Catherine, "I would bring him back to the communion of the Apostolic See."

A slight flush dyed the Archbishop's pale countenance.

"You do well not to make the attempt, madam," he said, very gravely. "The King will never be reconciled to Rome."

"Perhaps," observed the Queen, with a singular smile.

"Never!" repeated the Archbishop. "Be not deceived. The rupture is too complete to be restored. His Majesty's hostility to the Papal rule is as strong as ever; and he is unrelaxing in his endeavours to detach both the King of France and the Emperor from the communion of Rome. But let us not discuss this further. My prayer to your Highness is for the protection of the Protestant party, so that further calamities may be averted. Drive us not to extremities. In the hope that you may listen

to our supplications, and that further evil may be averted, I humbly take my leave."

With a profound obeisance, he withdrew.

The Archbishop had not been gone long, when Norfolk and Gardiner entered the Queen's cabinet; and on learning what Cranmer had said, they expressed great indignation at his audacity.

"He shall not long have the power of using such menacing language towards your Highness!" said Gardiner. "The welfare of our Church, and your own personal safety, demand his immediate removal. Your influence with the King cannot be better employed than in causing his immediate arrest, and committal to the Tower. Leave us to deal with him. He shall win his martyr's crown at Smithfield!"

"Oh, no, my lord!" exclaimed Catherine. "I cannot aid in his destruction."

"What means this!" said Norfolk. "He is our worst enemy. We must crush him, in self-defence."

"Do not expect me to do aught against him with the King," said Catherine. "I have promised to protect him, and I will keep my word, at all hazards."

"You will repent this mistaken clemency, madam," said Gardiner. "Cranmer is not to be trusted. We know that he has been secretly corresponding with the Duke of Cleves—holding out hopes that you may be divorced, and the Princess taken back."

"I fear him not," said the Queen. "Let him do his worst against me. I will not injure him."

The two councillors regarded each other in dismay.

Subsequently, when they were alone together, Gardiner remarked, "What can be the Queen's motive for thus

befriending Cranmer? He may have essayed to make a convert of her; but she is too good a Catholic to listen to him."

"I cannot understand it," rejoined Norfolk. "But if she refuses to aid our designs, she shall not thwart them."

IV.

THE QUEEN RECEIVES A VISIT FROM THE OLD DUCHESS OF NORFOLK.

SINCE her marriage, Catherine had seen nothing of the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk. She had not been to the mansion at Lambeth, and the old dame could not be induced to quit her retirement, and come to Court.

It was, therefore, a pleasurable surprise to her, when, one day, she received a visit from her aged relative.

The Duchess's deportment was as formal as if there had been no relationship between them. On approaching the Queen, she made a profound reverence, and would have remained at a distance, and in a respectful attitude, if Catherine had not sprung forward and embraced her.

"Can I have few words in private with your Highness?" said the Duchess.

Catherine signed to her attendants, who immediately withdrew, and left her alone with the Duchess.

She then led her aged relative to a fauteuil, and knelt down beside her on an embroidered velvet cushion.

"Ah! now you look like my own dear grandchild," said the Duchess, with tears starting to her eyes.

"I would never look otherwise," cried Catherine. "You must not treat me as Queen, dear grandam."

"Nay, I know my duty better," rejoined the old Duchess; "but your Highness is exceedingly gracious."

"A truce to this formality, dear grandam," cried Catherine, embracing her. "I owe respect to you, and shall never fail to pay it. And now, what have you to say to me?—what can I do for you?"

"I want nothing for myself," replied the Duchess; "I seek your interest in behalf of the dearest and best friend I ever possessed, who is now a prisoner in the Tower. I allude to the Countess of Salisbury, mother of the illustrious Cardinal Pole. The Countess is the last of the Plantagenets in the direct line, being daughter of the ill-fated Duke of Clarence, and niece to King Edward the Fourth. Furthermore, she is his Majesty's cousin. She is incapable of any criminal act. Yet she has been attainted of treason, and condemned to death. Already, she has suffered deeply. Her son, Lord Montague, was beheaded for an alleged conspiracy against the King, together with her nephew, the Marquis of Exeter. They were wrongfully put to death. Men more loyal never breathed. I come not from the Countess, who is too proud to solicit pardon; but loving and honouring her as I do, I would save her from most unmerited punishment. She is innocent of all offence against the King."

"Her chief offence in his Majesty's eyes is that she is the mother of Cardinal Pole," observed Catherine.

"He holds her as a hostage for the Cardinal; and should any provocation be given, her fate would be sealed."

"That is what I dread," said the Duchess. "The best and noblest woman in England may be sacrificed for no fault of her own. Save her while it is yet time. I have heard it whispered that emissaries from Pole have been seen in Yorkshire, and that an insurrection is likely to take place in that county. Should it be so, the Countess is lost. I have spoken to the Duke of Norfolk, and the Bishop of Winchester, but neither of them will interfere in her behalf. They dare not brook the King's displeasure. I, therefore, come to you. By a word, you can obtain the Countess's liberation."

"Were it so, dear grandam, she should be free within an hour," replied Catherine. "But the King is so violently incensed against Cardinal Pole, that he will not part with the means he possesses of wreaking his vengeance upon him."

"Then there is no escape for the Countess," groaned the old dame.

"You think a rising will take place in Yorkshire?" inquired Catherine.

"I much fear it," replied the Duchess.

"In that case, no time must be lost, if she is to be saved. At all hazards, I will make the attempt. The King goes to the Tower to-morrow, and I shall accompany him. I will ask his permission to see the Countess in her prison-chamber. When I have conversed with her, I shall be better able to plead her cause."

"Heaven crown your efforts with success!" exclaimed the Duchess. "Now that my errand is fulfilled, I shall not tarry longer."

"Nay, dear grandam, you shall not depart thus," cried Catherine; "you must see the King."

"His Majesty cares not for an old woman like me," rejoined the Duchess. "I am out of place at so gay a Court."

No persuasions could induce her to remain. Quitting Windsor Castle forthwith, she returned to her mansion at Lambeth.

V.

THE OLD COUNTESS OF SALISBURY.

In the upper chamber of the Bowyer's Tower, one of the chain of fortifications in the inner ballium walls of the Tower of London, then used as a state-prison, knelt an ancient dame.

She had just come forth from a small cell, contrived in the thickness of the stone wall, wherein her pallet was placed, and was prostrated before a crucifix set in a little niche. Such light as the barred windows afforded fell upon her noble countenance, which, in spite of the ravages of time and affliction, still wore a very proud expression.

Lofty in stature and grandly proportioned, she was wasted almost to a skeleton, not merely by long imprisonment, but by severe self-imposed penance. The extreme meagreness of her person was discernible through her furred velvet gown. Her snow-white locks escaped from beneath a black silk coif. A rosary hung from her girdle, and she counted the beads while devoutly reciting her prayers.

This venerable dame was Margaret, Countess of Salisbury. She was of royal descent, being daughter of George, Duke of Clarence, and niece of King Edward the Fourth. Her high qualities will be understood when we mention that she had been Catherine of Arragon's chosen friend and confidante, and that the education of the Princess Mary was entrusted to her care.

A sad fatality had attended her family. Within the chamber in which we find her, had been imprisoned her brother, Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick, who was beheaded by Henry the Seventh, lest he should lay claim to the Crown. In the lower chamber of the same tower, her father, the Duke of Clarence, was strangely and mysteriously murdered. Henry the Eighth's relentless hatred of the youngest and most illustrious of her sons, Cardinal Pole, caused him to wreak his vengeance upon all those of her family who were within his reach. The Lord Montague was beheaded, and she herself, attainted and condemned, was kept within the Tower as a hostage for the Cardinal.

Her devotions finished, the venerable Countess, seating herself at a table, opened a small casket containing some sacred relics and a miniature.

The miniature was that of Catherine of Arragon, and had been given her years ago by the unhappy Queen. After contemplating it for a few minutes, and apostrophizing it affectionately, she restored it to the casket.

A deep melancholy then came over her, and she experienced that utter desolation of heart which no solitary captive can escape. She essayed to read her primer, but was obliged to desist. A chill like death came over her, and damps gathered upon her pallid brow.

She had just recovered from this crisis, and was about to resume her devotions, when she was disturbed by unwonted sounds without. Footsteps were heard on the spiral stone staircase. Could the officers be coming to take her to execution? It might be so, but she was prepared.

Next moment the ponderous door was unbarred, and the tall figure of the Lieutenant of the Tower could be distinguished. Then she felt certain her last hour was come.

What was her amazement when Sir William Kingston, advancing a few steps, announced the Queen. He then retired, and closing the heavy door, remained outside with the guard, leaving Catherine standing like a radiant vision in the midst of the gloomy chamber.

The Countess, who had risen on the lieutenant's entrance, regarded her with wonder and admiration.

On her part, Catherine was inexpressibly touched by the woful spectacle presented to her. Such a wreck of greatness she had never before beheld. She was so pained, so awe-struck, that she could not speak.

"Are you indeed the Queen?" asked the Countess, breaking silence. "Pardon the inquiry—I am old, and may not have heard aright—yet you answer to the description I have received of the King's new consort, Catherine Howard. You are very young—very beautiful! My royal mistress was Catherine of Arragon. She was not so fair as you, but she made up in worth for her lack of personal charms. If you are the Queen, you are cousin to Anne Boleyn."

"True, Countess," replied Catherine; "but I am also granddaughter to your old friend, the Duchess of Nor-

folk, who has sent me to you. Let it not offend you to be told that I am the Queen."

The Countess made her a profound obeisance, and said, "Such homage as one in my position may render, I offer to your Highness."

"I accept your homage, noble Countess," replied Catherine, raising her. "I entirely believe in your innocence."

For a moment, the proud old dame seemed almost overcome. But conquering her emotion by a great effort, she reared herself to her full height, and said:—

"No one ever questioned my duty and allegiance, until my son, the Cardinal, incurred his Majesty's displeasure. I am nearest the King in blood of all his relatives, except his children."

"I know you are the last of the royal line of Plantagenet, Countess," observed the Queen.

"As such, could I be wanting in loyalty to the King? No! But his mind was poisoned by Cromwell, the worst minister that ever directed a monarch's councils, or oppressed a nation. I have had many wrongs — wrongs that might have shaken a loyalty less fervent than mine, but I endured them patiently.

"Charges were forged against me by Cromwell. Cowdray, my country seat, whither I had retired, was filled with his emissaries. My servants were seized and interrogated. Nothing could be extracted from them. My house was searched for proofs of my criminality. Some Papal dispensations were found, together with a few unimportant letters from my son, the Cardinal. The sole evidence of treason that could be discovered was a small silken banner, embroidered with the five wounds of our Blessed Redeemer. This being the symbol of the Pil-

grimage of Grace, was held to connect me with that rebellion. But the accusation was false—utterly false.

"Unable to wrest an admission of guilt from me, Cromwell had recourse to another expedient, and devised an infamous process—the Bill of Attainder—by means of which I was attainted and condemned without trial, and all my lands and revenues confiscated to the King.

"Since then, this chamber has been my prison, nor shall I quit it till I am taken to my doom. By a refinement of cruelty, I have been lodged in the same tower wherein my brother, the Earl of Warwick, was imprisoned, and in which my father, the Duke of Clarence, was foully murdered. I have been treated with the utmost rigour, deprived of all the comforts, almost of the necessaries of life, and debarred from all correspondence with my beloved son, Cardinal Pole. How long I have been kept here I know not, for I have not counted the days, but it seems long—very long."

After a pause, she added fiercely, "But retribution has overtaken the wretch who contrived my destruction. He has been caught in his own snare. Condemned unheard and unpitied, Cromwell has been brought to the block."

"You shall not be detained here much longer, Countess, if I can procure your deliverance," said Catherine, who had listened with the deepest sympathy to her narration. "Perchance I may prevail upon the King to extend his mercy towards you. Suffer me to bear a petition to him from you."

"Never!" exclaimed the old dame, haughtily. "It is not for a daughter of the House of York to sue for mercy, in abject terms, like the base-born Cromwell. I

would not ask my life from the King. Appeal to his sense of justice in my behalf, if you will; but I well know the appeal will be in vain."

"I trust not," replied the Queen; "at any rate, the attempt shall be made."

Just then, a loud and imperious voice, which both Catherine and the Countess recognised too well, was heard without, commanding the lieutenant to throw open the door, and the next moment the King burst into the prison-chamber.

His furious looks filled the Queen with terror, but in no wise daunted the resolute old dame.

Glaring at the Countess as if he would annihilate her, he turned to the Queen, and vociferated, "How think you, Kate? We have rare news from the north! Another Catholic insurrection in Yorkshire—a second Pilgrimage of Grace, forsooth!—and headed by Sir John Neville—your kinsman, madam—your kinsman!" he added, in a taunting tone, to the Countess. "But this new rebellion will be as short-lived as the first."

"Short-lived or not, I have naught to do with it," observed the old dame, coldly.

"But your son, the Cardinal, has, if you have not, madam," rejoined Henry. "He has been again inciting my subjects to rebellion."

"Whoever said so, lied!" cried the Countess.

"I have proof of his treason under his own hand!" rejoined the King; "a letter from him to Sir John Neville has been intercepted, wherein he says that, 'being excommunicated by the Pope, I may be lawfully deprived of my royal estate and dignity.' What say you to that?"

"I have nothing to say to it," replied the Countess.

"The insurrection will be speedily suppressed," pursued Henry; "and then will come the chastisement of the rebels. Sir John Neville shall be beheaded at York. Oh, that I had his adviser within my grasp! Oh, that the arch-traitor, Reginald Pole, were here! But I can strike him," he cried, with fierce exultation. "With the tidings of the failure of his design, he shall receive intelligence of his mother's execution!"

"Oh, no, my dearest liege!" exclaimed Catherine, throwing herself at his feet. "Do not sacrifice this noble lady to your resentment against her son. She can have had no part in this rebellion; and to put her to death for the Cardinal's fault would be unworthy of so just a monarch as yourself. Shame him by your magnanimity."

"Desist, madam!" cried the Countess. "As well seek to move a rock, as this inexorable man. He is destitute of all feelings of humanity."

"Rise, Kate!" cried Henry. "You ought to know that I have no pity for my enemies, and I account Cardinal Pole the worst of them. He has ever been secretly conspiring against me."

"I deny it!" cried the Countess energetically. "You judge him by yourself. Since he has eluded you, you have constantly sought to have him put to death by secret means. By whom were the three bravos hired at Viterbo? By whom were the English assassins sent to Cassali? But their fell designs were frustrated; heaven guarded my son from their poniards, as it will continue to guard him from your vengeance."

"That remains to be seen," rejoined Henry. "Meantime, you shall not escape. Make your shrift, madam; for, by my father's head, you shall die to-morrow!"

Catherine uttered a cry, but did not dare to make another attempt to move him to compassion.

The old Countess stretched out her withered arms, and, in a voice that appalled even Henry, exclaimed, "Tremble, thou man of blood! Barbarities unheard of have marked thy reign! Thou hast destroyed the best of the priesthood, and the wisest of thy counsellors! Thou hast cut off the flower of the nobility, and now thou hast come to defenceless and unoffending women! Tremble, I say!—the measure of thine iniquity is complete!"

"What, ho, lieutenant!" vociferated Henry; "let us forth. This crazy beldame stuns me with her talk, and scares the Queen. Conduct me to your lodgings. I will sign her death-warrant before I quit the Tower! Come, Kate!"

But the Queen was so terrified that she could scarcely move.

As she essayed to follow, the old Countess came up to her, and said, in a low voice,

"The blessing of a dying woman rest upon you! Heaven grant you may not be a victim of this merciless tyrant!"

VI.

IN WHAT MANNER THE OLD COUNTESS OF SALISBURY WAS PUT TO DEATH.

Henry's ruthless treatment of the old Countess of Salisbury revived all Catherine's terrors.

Never had he exhibited such violence in her presence —never had he so utterly disregarded her feelings; and she shuddered to think that she was united to a tyrant, who would sacrifice her without hesitation, in a moment of anger.

For awhile, she scarcely dared to look at him lest she should betray what was passing in her breast.

Luckily, he gave little heed to her. On quitting the Tower, he proceeded in his barge to Lambeth Palace, where he had a long interview with Cranmer.

At its close he went on direct to Windsor Castle, and was engaged during the whole time in deep discourse with the Earl of Hertford, whom he had met at Lambeth.

They were deliberating upon the best means of putting down the insurrection, which the Earl was disposed to regard as a serious affair. At the King's request, Hertford undertook the task, and agreed to set out for the North forthwith. Henry charged him to show no mercy to the rebels. We shall see anon how well he fulfilled his Majesty's commands.

Two days afterwards, when she had somewhat recovered from the shock she had received, Catherine learnt the terrible details of the old Countess's death,

not from the King, but from Adrian Culpepper, who had witnessed the execution. No one was with the Queen but Lady Rochford, when she listened to the mournful narration.

"All is over with the noblest and best lady in England," said Adrian; "and though she bore herself to the end with a courage never surpassed under such dreadful circumstances, I cannot reflect upon her death without grief and horror.

"A spectacle so frightful I never thought to witness. The scaffold was reared on the Tower Green, opposite St. Peter's Church; and as the King had given orders that the execution should be private, none but officials were allowed to be present. I was there, in obedience to his Majesty's injunctions, and was stationed near Sir William Kingston.

"When the Countess was brought forth from her prison, she surprised us all by her firmness, and by the majesty of her deportment. Not an inch of her lofty stature was lost as she marched to death. A smile irradiated her pallid features, and her looks were fixed upon heaven.

"I was standing near the foot of the scaffold, and as she approached, she looked hard at me; and, thinking she had something to say, I went close up to her. 'I have left a little reliquary for the Queen," she said. 'My confessor will give it to you. Tell her I prayed for her.'"

"Alas!" exclaimed Catherine. "Coming from her, the reliquary will be doubly sacred."

"I now come to the saddest part of my relation, and I would not pain you with it, did I not think needful you should learn the martyrdom she has undergone."

"Go on, I pray you," said the Queen.

"Her confessor awaited her on the scaffold, and near the block stood the masked executioner, leaning on his axe—a horrible object. No female attendant was present. She who had once had twenty women at her beck, had then not one.

"Kneeling down beside her confessor, she prayed long and fervently. When she arose, she exclaimed in an audible voice, 'Blessed are they who suffer persecution for righteousness sake.' As she stood there at that moment, with her white locks streaming over her shoulders, her expression was sublime. I have her before me now."

"I, myself, can picture her," exclaimed the Queen.

"While she stood thus, the horrible masked personage, who had hitherto remained motionless as a statue, stepped up to her, and touching her shoulder, said, in a rough, insolent tone, 'Kneel down, madam, and place your head upon the block.'

"Recoiling from his touch, as if he had been a reptile, and regarding him with scorn, she exclaimed, indignantly, 'Kneel at thy bidding, fellow—never!' 'Make no more ado, proud dame,' he rejoined. ''Tis customary for traitors to die thus.' 'But I am no traitor,' she rejoined, energetically. 'If you want my head, you must get it as you can.'

"With this, she flew to the further side of the scaffold, but the caitiff pursued her, and seizing her reverend locks, dragged her to the block. A scene of horror followed, which I will not attempt to describe; but before it closed, that noble form was ruthlessly mangled, and those snowy locks dabbled with blood."

"Horror!" exclaimed both his hearers; while the

Queen placed her hands before her eyes, as if to exclude some dreadful sight.

"What will Cardinal Pole say when he hears of his mother's terrible end?" observed Lady Rochford.

"He may console himself with the reflection that he is the son of a martyr, and that he has one more patron saint in heaven," replied Adrian.

"Truly she has won her crown of martyrdom for her constancy to the Catholic faith!" exclaimed the Queen.

"Here is the reliquary she left you, madam," said Adrian. "It was given me by her confessor, when all was over."

Catherine pressed the little casket fervently to her bosom.

VII.

HOW DEREHAM WAS APPOINTED THE QUEEN'S SECRETARY.

THE Catholic insurrection in the North was speedily quelled by the Earl of Hertford, who made a severe example of the rebels. Sir John Neville was beheaded at York, and several priests, who had instigated the rising, were hanged at the same time.

The result of the outbreak was naturally to restore the Protestant party to favour, and prejudice the Romanists. Norfolk and Gardiner were still at the head of affairs, but their influence was materially shaken, and the bitter persecution of the partisans of the new learning was checked.

But the Protestant leaders could not feel secure so long as a Catholic Queen was on the throne. Suspecting

some sinister designs against her, Catherine, aided by Lady Rochford, took all possible precautions to prevent the discovery of the fatal secret that poisoned her existence.

At last, they succeeded in removing Mary Lassells. How this was accomplished, we shall proceed to relate.

At the instance of the Earl of Hertford, who, since his expedition, was in very high favour, the King had resolved to make a progress into Yorkshire, in order to awe his disaffected subjects by his presence.

Hertford's object in making this suggestion was to obtain the administration of affairs during the King's absence, and he succeeded in his design. Henry appointed him head of an Anti-Papal Council, which comprised Cranmer and Audeley—thus superseding, for the time, Norfolk and Gardiner.

The Queen's enemies were therefore in the ascendant, and it behoved her to guard against their machinations. Hitherto, Cranmer had shown no hostility towards her, but his forbearance could not be relied on.

Mary Lassells desired to be included among the Queen's attendants during the progress; but to this, Catherine objected. Still, it would not be safe to leave the mischievous woman behind. What was to be done?

Both the Queen and her confidante were terribly perplexed. The time for the King's setting forth on his progress was at hand, and the difficulty had not been obviated. Lassells was impracticable as ever.

The Court had returned to Greenwich, preparatory to the departure. One evening, while Catherine and Lady Rochford were alone together in the Queen's cabinet, the tapestry was raised, and Dereham stood before them.

His manner was changed, and for the better. He

was handsomely attired in black velvet, and had none of the audacity that he had formerly exhibited, but looked grave and respectful. He hastened to dispel the alarm occasioned by his sudden appearance.

"I have ventured to present myself thus to your Highness," he said, "because I can relieve you from an embarrassment, in which I know you are placed. You desire to be freed of Mary Lassells?"

"I do," replied the Queen. "Can you prevail on her to depart?"

"I can *remove* her," he replied. "She shall not trouble you more. She shall not breathe a word against you. This very night she shall disappear. Nor shall there be any clue to her place of concealment."

"What reward do you expect for this service?" inquired Lady Rochford.

Dereham smiled gravely, and bowed.

"I ask to be appointed the Queen's secretary," he said.

"My secretary!" exclaimed Catherine, indignantly. "Impossible!"

"Nothing less will content me," he replied, quietly. "This woman's instant removal is the only way to baffle the designs of your enemies. Cranmer will seek for her to-morrow. He must not find her."

"No, no! he must not!" cried Lady Rochford, eagerly. "But you must feel that your request cannot be complied with. Were the Queen to grant it, discovery must inevitably ensue."

"Have no fear of that," he rejoined. "I can so transform my features, that no one, not even Adrian Culpepper, shall recognise me as Francis Dereham."

And as he spoke, he produced such a wondrous

change in his visage and general appearance, that both the Queen and Lady Rochford were astounded.

They could scarcely believe he was the same individual they had looked upon. He seemed to have grown ten years older in a moment, and a slight stoop shortened his stature. His voice was likewise altered.

"You will be pleased, henceforth, to know me as Hugh Tilney," he said. "I think I may consider myself appointed your Highness's secretary?"

"Yes, let it be so," whispered Lady Rochford to the Queen. "You have no option."

Dereham smiled internally, for he guessed what she said.

"I must pray your Highness to decide quickly," he remarked, perceiving that Catherine hesitated.

"As Hugh Tilney you are appointed," she said. "But you are never, on any pretence, to resume your former character—never to be otherwise than a secretary should be—respectful in deportment, and obedient to my orders."

"That is quite understood, madam," he rejoined. "Of course I am to attend you during the progress?"

Catherine assented, with a sigh.

"Do not disquiet yourself further about Mary Lassells," he said. "She will quit the Palace to-night—never to return. To-morrow, Hugh Tilney will present himself."

Making a profound reverence, he drew back, raised the arras, and disappeared.

"That man must have dealings with Satan," said Lady Rochford, with a shudder.

"Why did you persuade me to accede to his request?" said the Queen, reproachfully.

"There was no help for it," rejoined Lady Rochford. "There is less danger with him than with Lassells."

"I do not think so," said Catherine. "He will be a constant spy over me."

That night, a man of a complexion so swarthy, that he looked like an African, brought a letter for Mary Lassells, which he would only deliver into her own hand.

After reading it, she said a few words to him in an under-tone, and shortly afterwards quitted the Palace.

One of the yeomen belonging to the royal barge, who chanced to be near the privy stairs, declared that she entered a boat with the mysterious messenger. Nothing more was seen of her.

Next day, Hugh Tilney was admitted to the Queen's household, in the capacity of her Highness's private secretary. From his gravity, quietude, and deferential manner, he seemed well suited to the office.

VIII.

THE ROYAL PROGRESS TO THE NORTH.

HENRY set out on his journey to the North in truly regal style.

Proceeding by very easy stages, he rested each day at the mansion of some nobleman, or wealthy gentleman, who had made preparations to receive him and his numerous suite.

The Queen, and the ladies of her household, travelled in splendid chariots, or litters; but Catherine not unfrequently mounted her palfrey, and rode by the side of the King, who preferred being on horseback.

The royal pair invariably entered a town in this fashion, for Henry delighted in presenting his lovely consort to the admiring gaze of his subjects.

Half a mile in advance of the cavalcade, which, seen even at that distance, presented a most splendid appearance, rode fifty spearmen, with trumpeters, whose loud flourishes summoned forth the inhabitants of each town they passed through.

A large company of Court gallants, in doublets of blue velvet and crimson satin, and wearing gold chains round the neck, followed the King, while pages and running footmen, in damask satin, attended the Queen.

Catherine was accompanied by her confessor and almoner, her comptroller, treasurer, private secretary, marshals, gentlemen ushers, grooms of the chamber—in short, by all the officers of the household. Only Lady Rochford sat with her in her chariot.

Henry, who seemed greatly to enjoy the expedition —as he well might, since everything was done to render it pleasant to him—conversed freely with his attendants, and laughed heartily at the jests of Will Sommers, who was constantly near him.

The persons in immediate attendance upon the King were the Duke of Norfolk and Sir Anthony Browne, but no one was more distinguished by his Majesty's notice than Adrian Culpepper.

If a message had to be sent to the Queen, Adrian was sure to be bearer of it, and did his devoir gallantly.

Catherine bestowed her sweetest smiles upon him as he aided her to mount her palfrey; and he was tormented by no jealousy, for he never dreamed that the new secretary, who kept sedulously out of his sight, was the detested Francis Dereham.

Admirable arrangements were made to ensure the King's comfort during his progress. A host of purveyors, cooks, confectioners, farriers, yeomen of the chariot, and grooms of the stable, with led horses, were sent on, so that nothing should be wanting.

Proceeding, as we have said, from one large mansion to another, the luxurious monarch taxed the owner's hospitality to the utmost, and always expected that a grand banquet should be offered him on his arrival.

Rarely did he pass more than one night at a house; but, if his reception satisfied him, he was not unwilling to prolong his stay.

At the princely mansion of Grafton, in Northamptonshire, where he was sumptuously entertained, and where grand banquets and costly masques were given him, he remained for nearly a week—devoting the mornings to

hunting, hawking, and other sports and pastimes, and the evenings to festivity and revelry.

Lincolnshire having been implicated in the late revolt, before entering the county, he caused a proclamation to be made by sound of trumpet, in all the cities and towns, that the King looked for the humble submission of the inhabitants.

Such an injunction could not be disregarded. Henry's liegemen well knew that their tyrannical Sovereign's pardon could only be purchased by rich gifts. Accordingly, five hundred pounds was presented to him by the two cities of Lincoln and Boston—other towns giving in proportion.

But, in Yorkshire, the King's exactions were far heavier. All those concerned in the rebellion, or suspected of being concerned in it, and who sought immunity for their offences, had to purchase it at a dearer rate.

At the borders of the county, a large number of gentlemen awaited his coming, ready to make submission.

On an extensive plain, just beyond Bawtrey, the King and Queen were met by two hundred Catholic gentlemen, all richly apparelled and well mounted.

With them were two thousand tall yeomen and serving-men, clad in the liveries of their masters, and making a very goodly appearance—so much so, that as Henry surveyed them, he observed to Sir Anthony Browne, "By St. Anne! those are stout fellows, and might prove dangerous rebels."

At the head of the horsemen was Sir Robert Bowes, a Yorkshire gentleman of ancient lineage, and a Catholic. Sir Robert rode slowly towards the King, who halted with the whole of his cortège.

The scene was very striking. Surrounding the royal pair, and such of their attendants as were permitted to be near them, were the spearmen, in glittering morions and corslets. Behind, was arranged a brilliant assemblage of high-born dames, nobles, and esquires.

Catherine was on her palfrey, and, by her smiles and gracious deportment, presented a strong contrast to her imperious spouse, whose countenance was clothed with frowns.

When within a certain distance of the King, Sir Robert Bowes signed to his followers, who instantly dismounted and knelt down, the whole of the yeomen and serving-men following their example.

Sir Robert then prostrated himself before the King, and, in humble terms, besought pardon for himself and his companions.

Henry regarded him sternly.

"Ye merit punishment rather than pardon for your treasonable doings," he cried. "Howbeit, our disposition being merciful, as ye wot, we are willing to accept your submission and extend our grace towards you, provided ye make ample amends."

"We have brought with us nine hundred pounds, sire; and we humbly crave your acceptance of the sum as a peace-offering," replied Sir Robert.

"'Tis not enough," remarked Will Sommers, who was close behind the King. "Bid him make it a thousand, or you will refuse the pardon."

"Peace, knave!" cried Henry. "You speak fairly, Sir Robert," he added, more graciously. "Believing that you and your companions have been misled by false and cunning priests, who have already suffered for their

offences—seeing, also, that you have returned to your duty and allegiance, and trusting that you will henceforward continue in loyalty and obedience to us, we grant your prayer. Rise, Sir Robert. You and your companions are pardoned."

The kneeling assemblage then arose, and loud shouts were raised for the King and his consort.

The money being presented to his Majesty in a large silver salver, Henry took a handful of broad pieces, and cast them among the yeomen, who again shouted lustily.

Sir John Bowes and his company escorted the royal pair to Doncaster, where they rested for the night at the ancient castle then standing on the banks of the Don.

IX.

HOW THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK MADE HIS SUBMISSION TO THE KING.

ANOTHER ceremonial, of far deeper interest to the young Queen than that previously described, occurred at Barnesdale, where Edward Lee, forty-eighth Archbishop of York, and the successor of Cardinal Wolsey, attended by upwards of three hundred priests, made submission to the King.

Henry received him very coldly.

"My lord Archbishop," he said, "in the former insurrection, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, you took on oath of fidelity to the rebels. Nevertheless, I pardoned you. Again I find you mixed up with treason

and revolt. What have you to allege in your defence? —ha!"

"I have been falsely accused, my liege—as all here can testify," replied the Archbishop. "So far from supporting the insurgents, I solemnly denounced their proceedings."

"But you took no active measures to check them."

"My liege, I could not," said the Archbishop, humbly. "I was made prisoner in my own palace, and was only released by the Earl of Hertford."

"Have you received any missive from Cardinal Pole?" demanded Henry, sternly. "Answer me truly."

"As I shall answer to heaven, my liege, I have not!"

Henry's brow still remained sombre.

The Archbishop cast an imploring look at the Queen.

"Sire, you need not doubt his Grace's sincerity," she said. "My uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, and the Bishop of Winchester, both vouch for his loyalty and zeal."

"Your Grace has a good advocate in the Queen," said Henry, smiling. "Since she espouses your cause, it is won. You may thank her Highness for your restoration to favour."

The Archbishop's looks bespoke his heartfelt gratitude.

Any lingering feeling of displeasure that the King might have entertained, was removed by a present of six hundred pounds.

At York, further contributions were levied by the rapacious tyrant, though heavy fines had already been imposed upon the city.

X.

YORK.

No place had suffered in a greater degree from the suppression of the religious houses than York.

Its glory had departed. Its splendid monasteries, its numerous hospitals, its churches and chapels, and the noble Abbey of St. Mary, had been demolished, and their large revenues appropriated by the King.

All the shrines had been despoiled, vaults ransacked, and even graves desecrated in search of treasure. Stone coffins, which had contained the bodies of reverend fathers, were converted into hog-troughs.

No wonder York, which was essentially a Catholic city, resented such usage, and rose in rebellion!

When Henry entered the city, it was half-depopulated; while the many poor monks and nuns, who had been driven from the religious houses, and were now compelled to subsist on charity, gave it a most melancholy air.

The sight of these sufferers profoundly affected Catherine, and she caused abundant alms to be distributed among them, at the risk of incurring her royal husband's displeasure.

Most sad of all was it to see the aged and infirm, who had now no place of refuge, since the hospitals that had formerly sheltered them were destroyed. By her benign influence over the King, the Queen was enabled to procure some alleviation of the general misery, and countless blessings were showered on her head.

Alas! they availed her little.

Catherine was charmed with the majestic Minster, and with the picturesque aspect of the ancient city, but her delight was marred by the sight of the many desolate places caused by the destruction of the monasteries and fanes.

If the exterior of the Minster delighted her, she was struck with astonishment at the incomparable beauty and grandeur of the interior.

When she first entered the magnificent structure, its superb windows were illuminated by the declining sun, and the light thus shed upon its pillars and arches produced a truly magical effect.

As her eye swept down the long vista formed by the stately columns on either side of the nave, and rested on the statues of archbishops and saints, or on the scutcheons of kings, as she gazed at the glorious eastern window, she experienced a pleasure such as she had never before enjoyed, and, for a few moments, forgot all earthly things.

Though not affected in the same degree, Henry was greatly impressed by the magnificence of the cathedral.

Twice each day the royal pair heard mass in one of the chapels, and they also attended some grand religious ceremonials that took place during their stay in the city.

A splendid sight it was to see them with their richly-attired attendants gathered within the choir on these occasions—the Archbishop, assisted by the Dean, officiating at the altar.

Though erring, Catherine was devout, and she never performed her devotions with more fervour than in York

Minster. How few of those who regarded her with admiration at such times, anticipated her sad fate!

The royal pair resided at the magnificent archiepiscopal palace, and constant banquets were given in the great hall, accounted one of the finest in the kingdom.

Having stricken sufficient terror, as he deemed, into his rebellious subjects, Henry now began to adopt milder measures. The country abounded, as we have said, with important Catholic families, and the heads of these ancient houses now flocked to York, and were very well received by the King, who invited them to all his entertainments.

By this time, Catherine's ascendancy over her imperious spouse had been completely established; he doted on her more than ever; granted all her requests, and strove to gratify all her tastes. Her influence over him was so manifest, that strong hopes were entertained by the Romanists that she would bring him back to the old religion. Being herself of this opinion, Catherine sent a private message to the Duke of Norfolk, recommending him and Gardiner to meet the King at Lincoln on his return.

Henry remained longer than he intended at York, because he expected a visit from his nephew, James the Fifth, of Scotland.

He had despatched Adrian Culpepper to Edinburgh, with an invitation to the young King; but James, distrusting his uncle's good faith, and not caring to place himself in his power, declined to cross the border.

This was a great disappointment to Henry, who had made splendid preparations for his nephew's reception; and it was also a disappointment to Catherine, who wished to see the gallant young King.

XI.

PONTEFRACT CASTLE.

On the summit of a rocky hill stood the proud old Castle of Pontefract.

At the period of our history it was one of the strongest fortresses in the country. Its walls were flanked by seven towers, and its drawbridges protected by watch-towers. The walls of its donjon were of prodigious thickness.

For the space of many centuries it stood the ornament and terror of the surrounding country. During the civil war of Charles I. it withstood three sieges, and was then demolished by the Parliamentary armies.

Only the donjon and a few ruins are now left to tell of its former strength and magnitude, but with these ruins many strange and terrible historical recollections are connected.

In the great castle hall, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, was arraigned by his nephew, Edward the Second, condemned, and decapitated. "Within the guilty closure of its walls" the unhappy Richard the Second was horribly murdered. In the same blood-stained structure, "fatal and ominous to noble peers," the Lords Rivers and Grey, with others, were put to death by the ambitious Gloster, afterwards Richard the Third.

Pontefract Castle had dreadful dungeons, resembling *oubliettes,* into which the prisoners were let down through trap-doors, and sometimes left to perish miserably. Still, with all these gloomy associations, it was a magnificent pile, and fitted for a royal residence. It had

a noble hall, in which kings and barons had feasted; a chapel, remarkable for its beautiful Norman architecture; and a suite of grand state apartments.

Under the protection of the castle, a considerable town had sprung up, and until lately it had boasted a wealthy monastery, a convent, and several chantries; but these were now destroyed.

The haughty fortress looked over as fair a district as any in England—a lovely valley, skirted by woods, through which flowed the River Aire, with hills in the distance. From its walls the twin towers of York Minster could be descried.

Nothing could be grander or more picturesque in appearance than the stupendous fortress as viewed from the valley of the Aire; and so thought Henry, as he approached it in this direction, late in the day on which he had quitted York. After contemplating it for some time in silence, he remarked to the Queen, who was riding by his side, "Marry! 'tis a kingly pile! What think you of it, Kate?"

"May I speak truth, sire?" she rejoined.

"Certes," he replied; "I trust you never speak other than the truth."

"Then I will frankly own that I have a dread of Pontefract Castle. So many terrible deeds have been done within its walls, that I shall be afraid to sleep there. Look, sire! the setting sun seems to dye the towers with blood!"

Henry laughed.

"Tut! that purple light heightens their beauty. Have no fear; you will sleep sound enough, I warrant you—even if you occupy Richard the Second's chamber."

"Not that room, sire, I entreat," she exclaimed. "I should not dare to enter it."

"I did not think you were troubled with superstitious fancies, Kate," cried Henry, surprised. "King Dickon's room is the best in the state apartments, and on that account has been got ready for you, by my especial order; but since you like it not, you shall be lodged elsewhere."

He then signed to Adrian Culpepper, and bade him ride on to the castle, and cause another chamber to be prepared for the Queen.

"Take care you choose one that is not haunted," he added, with a laugh.

"That will be a difficult matter, gossip; seeing that all the rooms in the castle are haunted," observed Will Sommers. "I expect to make acquaintance with the ghost of Lord Rivers to-night."

"Thou art more likely to make acquaintance with a cudgel, knave, an' thou showest not more discretion," rejoined the King. "Away with thee, Adrian."

"With your Majesty's permission, I will go with him," said the jester; "and then I can choose a dormitory for myself."

"Thou shalt roost with the owls in the ruined Cluniac Priory on Monk Hill," rejoined Henry. "Go, find the spot."

Meanwhile, Adrian had galloped off on his errand, and the jester followed as swiftly as he could.

XII.

CELESTIN AND PASCHAL.

THOUGH the town's-folk of Pontefract had suffered as grievously as the citizens of York from the destruction of the religious houses, they gave a hearty welcome to the King and his lovely consort.

The church bells of All Saints' rang blithely. A procession, headed by minstrels, came forth to meet the royal pair, and every demonstration of loyalty was made, as they rode along the street leading to the castle—all the houses being decked with flags and banners, and other devices.

As the cavalcade mounted the steep ascent, a salute was fired from the barbican, and at the moment when the King and Queen crossed the drawbridge, the royal standard was hoisted on the summit of the keep.

The Earl of Effingham, governor of the castle, with the chief officers, received them at the gate, and after presenting the keys of the fortress on a velvet cushion to the King, marshalled the royal pair to the inner court, amid the braying of trumpets, and the thunder of cannon.

Here the arquebusiers composing the garrison were drawn up, and the scene was so animated that Catherine quite forgot her fears. But they were revived as she entered the apartments, which had a very gloomy look —the once-splendid furniture being tarnished, and the arras faded. However, she was far enough removed from

King Richard's bed-chamber, which was at the further extremity of the corridor.

A banquet was served in the great hall, in which Edward the Second had sat in judgment upon his nephew, but no one thought of that circumstance amid the festive proceedings.

While the company were leaving the hall at the termination of the banquet, two quick-witted pages named Celestin and Paschal, overheard Adrian Culpepper say in a low tone to Lady Rochford,

"I must see the Queen to-night. When the King has retired to rest, and all is quiet in the corridor, I will tap at the door of the ante-chamber."

"Do not come till midnight," replied Lady Rochford in the same tone.

And with a gesture of silence, she left him.

The two pages stared at each other in astonishment, almost doubting that they had heard aright.

However, they determined to satisfy themselves; and if their suspicion should be confirmed, they would be in possession of a secret, indeed—a secret involving the Queen's honour.

Catherine retired early, and left the King playing at gleek with Lord Effingham and Sir Anthony Browne.

While bidding her good night, his Majesty laughingly hoped that her slumbers would not be disturbed by ghosts.

At that moment the young spies detected a glance that passed between her and Adrian. The glance convinced them that the appointment would be kept.

Henry, who was winning, remained at play for another

hour, and was then ceremoniously conducted to "King Richard's Chamber," by the governor.

As soon as the corridor was clear, the inquisitive pages concealed themselves behind the curtains of a deep bay window, almost opposite the Queen's apartments.

How anxiously they waited for midnight! When the appointed hour came, the stillness of the corridor was broken by a slight sound, and cautiously peering forth, they perceived a tall figure glide stealthily along.

The person tapped softly at the door of the antechamber, as arranged, and was immediately admitted.

The spies could not be mistaken. A light burning in the room enabled them to distinguish both Adrian and the Queen.

As soon as the door was shut, they issued from their hiding-place.

"What would King Hal say if he had seen what we have seen?" chuckled Celestin. "Shall we go rouse him?"

"No, fool! we should gain nothing by that,—except, perhaps, a halter!" rejoined Paschal. "The discovery we have made will be a fortune to us, if properly used—as it shall be. The Queen can refuse us nothing, since a word about this midnight meeting would bring her and her lover to the block. Dost apprehend?"

"Perfectly," replied Celestin, with a slight laugh. "What shall we do next?"

"Wait here till the lucky minion comes forth," replied Paschal.

And they again shrouded themselves behind the curtains.

XIII.

THE FATAL MEETING.

When Adrian was admitted, the Queen was in the ante-chamber.

Alarmed by his looks, she signed to Lady Rochford not to leave her.

"Why have you sought this interview with me, Adrian?" she asked.

"I have come to remonstrate with you," he replied, sadly, "on the dreadful imprudence you have committed in taking into your household the man of all others who ought to have been kept from it. I have just discovered that Francis Dereham is now your private secretary, under the assumed name of Hugh Tilney. The villain is so well disguised, that, although I have seen him often, I did not recognise him till to-day, when he accidentally betrayed himself to me. Oh, Catherine!" he exclaimed, in a tone of anguish; "this rash act may prove fatal to you!"

"I could not help it, Adrian," she replied.

"Not help it?" he exclaimed. "Are you in the villain's power?"

"Listen to me, Adrian," she rejoined. "It is time you should hear the truth. I will conceal nothing from you, painful as it is to me to make the confession. This man, as you know, was one of the Duchess of Norfolk's pages. He was handsome and presumptuous. I was thoughtless—very thoughtless, for I was a mere girl, and I noticed him more than I ought to

have done. Emboldened by my indiscretion, he ventured to declare his love."

"*His* love! Oh, Catherine!"

"I ought to have repelled his suit with scorn, but I did not. I was spell-bound. Now I regard him with loathing; and, even then, I did not really love him—but I thought so."

"Proceed," said Adrian, regarding her so sternly, that she trembled beneath his gaze.

"Forgive me, Adrian!" she cried; "I did not wrong you, for our love did not then exist. When I told you my heart was free, I spoke the truth, as I speak it now. But I did not tell the whole truth. I kept back the incredible act of folly of which I had been guilty."

She paused. Adrian's anguish was almost intolerable.

"I am on the rack!" he cried. "Do not prolong my torture!"

"Tell him what happened,—I cannot," said the Queen to Lady Rochford. "Remember, I was scarce seventeen at the time."

"And bewitched by the most daring villain that ever breathed," said Lady Rochford. "He would not be content till he had bound her to him indissolubly!"

"What do I hear?" cried Adrian, half frenzied. "You were not wedded to him—ha?"

"I was betrothed!" replied Catherine. "Now the terrible secret is out!"

Adrian almost fell backwards, as if dealt a mortal blow.

Recovering himself, he asked, "But that fatal contract was annulled?"

Catherine remained silent.

"I will answer the question," said Lady Rochford. "It was not."

"Then the marriage with the King is not valid!" cried Adrian. "Why—why was this frightful risk incurred?"

"I was dazzled. But I now see the end of it—I discern the scaffold to which I shall be taken. Save me, Adrian!—save me!"

"How can I save you? I can kill this man; but his death will not obliterate the past. You may have other accusers. Who is that woman, Lassells?"

"She witnessed my betrothal."

"I feared so. And now I remember that inquiries were made for her by Cranmer immediately after her mysterious disappearance from the palace. What has become of her?"

"Dereham alone can tell. He promised she should trouble me no more. Oh, Adrian! I have gone on step by step, till retreat has become impossible. The end cannot be far off, unless you deliver me."

"How can I deliver you?" he cried, in accents of despair. "'Tis a task beyond my power. But your preservation shall be my sole thought. You have enemies among the Protestant leaders. None of them, I trust, have obtained any clue to this fatal secret. Yet Cranmer's inquiries for Mary Lassells alarm me. Dereham's presence is another, and a greater, danger. But, for the moment, we must bear with him, lest his sudden disappearance should excite suspicion, and lead to discovery."

"You are right," said Lady Rochford. "Such has been my counsel to the Queen."

"He is called my private secretary," said Catherine, with a look of scorn. "But he is only so in name. I never allow him to approach me."

"You shall be rid of him ere long," said Adrian. "The opportunity is sure to arrive. I would slay him now, but the fear of harming you restrains me."

"Bide your time," said Lady Rochford. "Yield not to any sudden impulse of anger. Above all, let him not perceive that you have recognised him."

"I will observe due caution," he replied.

"My fears will be lessened now you are with us, Adrian," said Catherine. "Wear this for my sake."

As she spoke, she detached a chain from her neck. He knelt down, and she placed it over his shoulder.

"I will wear it next my heart," he said.

As he arose, she looked earnestly at him, and murmured, in accents that he could not resist, "Ere we part, say you forgive me, Adrian,"

"I do forgive you, Catherine," he replied.

An impulse, that neither could resist, brought them together, and he strained her to his breast.

What a world of sadness as well of bliss was there in that embrace!

"You must not remain here longer, Adrian," said Lady Rochford, opening the door, and looking out into the corridor.

By this incautious act, she enabled the two spies to see the Queen leaning on Adrian's shoulder, and gazing tenderly into his face.

Lady Rochford stamped her feet impatiently.

Adrian, who was lost to everything except the rapture of the moment, was compelled to obey.

With an impassioned look at the Queen, he departed, and the door was instantly closed after him.

XIV.

AN ENCOUNTER IN THE CORRIDOR.

As Adrian disappeared in the darkness of the corridor, the two pages came forth.

They were moving slowly along, laughing, and making comments on what they had seen, when they became aware that some one was near them.

They could not clearly distinguish this person, but they felt sure it must be Adrian Culpepper, and became silent in a moment.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" demanded the new-comer, sternly. "You shall give an account of yourselves to the guard."

"You will rue it, if you take us to the guard, Master Adrian Culpepper," replied Paschal, in a defiant tone.

"Ay, you had best not trouble us," added Celestin. "We have seen—what we have seen."

"Like enough," rejoined the new-comer. "And pray what *have* you seen?"

"We have seen you enter the Queen's chamber," replied Paschal. "And we have waited upwards of an hour for your coming forth. What say you to that, fair sir?"

The person addressed started, but made no reply.

"Methinks it were wiser to purchase our silence,

than to threaten us," observed Celestin. "If taken to the guard, we might make unpleasant disclosures. Deal with us fairly, and we will deal fairly with you, sweet Master Adrian."

"You are impudent and lying varlets," cried the other, "and deserve to have your tongues plucked forth for making this false charge. Learn, to your confusion, that I am not Adrian Culpepper, as you suppose, but Hugh Tilney, the Queen's private secretary. As to the scandalous story you have invented, I can flatly contradict it. I have been in this corridor ever since the King retired to rest, and I have seen no one within it but yourselves. Insinuate aught against the Queen's honour, and you shall hang—ay, hang, my pretty masters; therefore, beware!"

Quite confounded by the secretary's boldness, and repenting that they had said so much to him, the two pages slunk off.

Left alone, Hugh Tilney remained stationary for a short space—apparently irresolute.

Rage prompted him to proceed to the Queen's apartments; but he checked himself, exclaiming, "No. The hour of vengeance has not yet arrived. Till then, I must protect her."

XV.

THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

On the morrow, Hugh Tilney repeated his admonitions to the two pages; and his menaces so terrified them, that they postponed their designs against Adrian to a more favourable juncture.

But though they continued their surveillance, they made no further discoveries. Adrian avoided the secretary, and the secretary avoided him. Both were biding their time.

Three days afterwards, Henry and his consort arrived at Lincoln, and were received by the Bishop, who was the King's confessor.

The Episcopal Palace of that time was little inferior to a baronial castle in size and grandeur, and boasted a vast and magnificent hall, supported by a double row of pillars. In this hall, the King and his attendants banqueted daily.

At Lincoln, the royal pair were met by the Duke of Norfolk and Gardiner, who came ostensibly to congratulate the King on the success of his progress, but, in reality, to accomplish Cranmer's overthrow, which they had so long meditated.

Catherine's influence over her husband, as we have shown, was now greater than ever; and she was prevailed upon to second their efforts—Gardiner persuading her that it was her duty as a good Catholic to aid them in removing every obstacle to the King's return to the Apostolic See.

Many conferences were held. Cranmer's heresies were denounced; and the King's anger against him being heightened by Catherine, he promised her that if the charges against the Primate could be substantiated, he should share the fate of Cromwell.

This was enough. Gardiner undertook to prefer charges against Cranmer that would ensure the Archbishop's condemnation as a heretic and schismatic.

Unluckily for the success of the design, Cranmer had a friend in the Bishop of Lincoln, who secretly conveyed to him intelligence of the plot—representing the great peril in which he stood; and adding, that if he would preserve his life, the Queen's pernicious influence over the King must be destroyed.

The missive communicating these alarming tidings was entrusted to Celestin, who, with his fellow-page, had made certain disclosures to the Bishop.

On receiving the letter, Cranmer took immediate measures for his own safety. He learnt much from Celestin, who had been enjoined by the Bishop of Lincoln to reveal all he knew to him.

But he desired further and corroborative evidence of the Queen's guilt; and he succeeded in obtaining it, as we shall proceed to relate.

Meanwhile, the royal pair pursued their journey southwards, little dreaming of the impending catastrophe.

XVI.

A CONSULTATION.

UNTIL he had obtained all the evidence he needed, Cranmer refrained from consulting with his colleagues in the Anti-Papal Council; but as soon as his investigations were completed, he summoned the Lord Chancellor and the Earl of Hertford to Lambeth Palace, and laid the matter before them.

Nothing could exceed their astonishment at the revelation made to them.

"I see you are reluctant to believe my terrible relation," said the Archbishop; "and I do not wonder at your incredulity. 'Tis inconceivable, indeed, that one so richly graced by nature, and so seemingly virtuous, as the young Queen, could have thus erred. But I have proofs of her guilt. Truly, the King has been unfortunate in his consorts. The only one who deserved his love was your sister, Queen Jane Seymour," he added, to the Earl of Hertford.

"And she was taken from him," observed Hertford, gravely.

"Your Grace has proofs of the Queen's culpability, you say?" remarked the Lord Chancellor.

"I have witnesses, my lord, whom you yourself can interrogate," rejoined Cranmer. "But before introducing them, suffer me to describe the extraordinary manner in which the retreat of the most important of them, Mary Lassells, came to be discovered. So strange was the dis-

covery, that, happening when it did, I cannot but discern in it the finger of God.

"Cromwell's last words to me were, that a certain Mary Lassells, if duly questioned, would furnish me with the means of dissolving the King's union with Catherine Howard. This woman, he said, was then in the Queen's household. I inquired for her, but in vain. The Queen herself positively denied that there was any such person among her household, and I own I felt reluctant to proceed further in so painful a business—especially when her Highness promised to mitigate the persecution of our partisans."

"Your Grace displayed too much forbearance," remarked the Lord Chancellor. "If you attached any weight to Cromwell's dying advice, you ought to have pursued the inquiry, without regard to consequences. After your talk with the Queen, it was certain Mary Lassells would be removed."

"So, indeed, it happened," said Cranmer. "I subsequently ascertained that Lassells had been spirited away from Greenwich Palace; and from the manner of her disappearance, I entertained very little doubt as to her fate. If my conjectures were correct, the evidence against the Queen, whatever it might be, had been destroyed."

The Earl of Hertford slightly shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at the Chancellor.

"Now mark, my lords, I pray you, how wonderful are the ways of heaven!" pursued Cranmer. "On the very same day that the messenger brought me the letter for the Bishop of Lincoln, a man, named Ludgrave, one of the King's bargemen at Greenwich Palace, besought

a private audience of me, stating that he had matter of importance to communicate.

"He informed me that chancing to be on St. Margaret's Hill in Southwark, he had encountered the African with whom Lassells had privily quitted the palace, and instantly recognising the dark-skinned villain, though the other knew him not, had followed him warily to a wretched tenement on the Bank Side.

"Further investigations resulted in the discovery that a woman was concealed in a vault beneath the house; and believing the captive to be Mary Lassells, he came with the intelligence to me, being aware that I had made search for her.

"On hearing this, I sent some of my officers with Ludgrave to the house, when, as he suspected, Mary Lassells was found in the vault. Mourzouk, the African, was seized at the same time, though he made a stout resistance, and both he and the miserable woman were brought here."

"This is strange, indeed!" exclaimed his auditors.

"You shall now see her," said the Archbishop.

And striking a small silver bell placed on the table, he directed the grave usher, who answered the summons, to bring in Mary Lassells.

XVII.

HOW MARY LASSELLS WAS INTERROGATED.

VERY pitiable was Mary Lassells's appearance. Her frame was emaciated, her cheeks hollow, her eyes lustreless; and though restoratives had been given her, she was still so feeble, that during the examination that ensued, she was allowed to sit down.

"My deliverance was only just in time," she said. "For two months, or more, I have been imprisoned in the dark, dank vault from which I have been taken—my sole diet being bread and water. I was fast sinking, and a few more days would have seen me out. But heaven willed that I should not die till I had disclosed the secret that has weighed so heavily on my soul! Question me, I pray you, my lords, and I will answer truthfully."

"By whom have you thus been held in *duresse,* and from what motive?" demanded Audeley.

"I have been imprisoned by the African slave, Mourzouk, by order of his master, Francis Dereham. Dereham's motive for treating me thus cruelly, was to keep me concealed from his Grace of Canterbury."

"Where is Dereham now?" demanded the Earl of Hertford.

"With the Queen," replied Lassells. "He is her private secretary."

"You are mistaken, woman," said the Chancellor. "Her Highness's private secretary is named Hugh Tilney."

"Hugh Tilney and Francis Dereham are one and the same person," returned Lassells.

Audeley uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"How comes it that the Queen thus favours him?" demanded Hertford.

"She has good reason for doing so," replied Lassells, with a malignant smile that gave a strange expression to her haggard countenance.

Then, speaking with great deliberation, in order that not a word she uttered might be lost, she said, "When Francis Dereham was page to the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, he was the Lady Catherine Howard's lover—Lady Catherine being then barely sixteen."

"Alas! so young, to be ensnared by such a villain!" ejaculated Cranmer.

"If I had said he was her husband, I should not have been much wide of the truth," pursued Lassells.

"Her husband?" exclaimed Hertford, stupefied.

"Ay, my lord! She had plighted her troth to him."

"We are learning something now," remarked Hertford.

"How know you that the Lady Catherine had plighted her troth to this man?" demanded the Chancellor. "From hearsay?"

"By the evidence of my own eyes and ears, my lord. I witnessed their betrothal. It took place in a little rustic temple situated in a secluded part of the Duchess's garden at Lambeth."

"And you were present, you say, woman?" demanded the Chancellor.

"I was the sole witness, my lord."

"Was any discovery made by the Duchess of her

granddaughter's intimate relations with Dereham?" inquired Hertford.

"I think not, my lord. But she was angered by his attentions to the Lady Catherine, and dismissed him."

"What followed?"

"I was sent away; and money and jewels were given me by the Lady Catherine never to divulge her secret."

"You have well performed your promise," observed Hertford, indignantly. "Hark ye, woman! Were you Dereham's mistress?"

"I will not attempt to deny it, my lord," she replied, hanging her head.

"And you helped to betray the Lady Catherine—then only a girl of sixteen?" said the Chancellor, sternly.

Lassells made no reply.

"You hear me, woman?" thundered Audeley.

"Alas! my lord, it is too true."

"You richly deserve the cruel treatment you have experienced from him," observed the Chancellor.

"Did Dereham keep up any correspondence with the Lady Catherine after his dismissal?" asked Hertford.

"No, my lord; he sailed for the coast of Africa, and joined Dragut, the Corsair."

"Joined Dragut? Why, then his life is already forfeited!" cried Hertford. "On his return, did he make any attempt to claim the Lady Catherine?"

"He had a secret interview with her, but she refused to fulfil her promise, having transferred her affections to Adrian Culpepper. What he might have done, I know not, for he was frenzied with rage and jealousy; but he found a new and far more formidable rival in the King. Since then he has nourished only schemes of vengeance, in which I have been forced to aid him."

"And when your presence endangered his schemes, you were unhesitatingly removed?" observed Hertford.

"He would have caused me to be murdered, if he had not thought that I might still be useful to him," said Lassells.

The examination was continued for some time longer, but as the particulars elicited are already known to the reader, it does not seem necessary to repeat them.

Lassells appeared to gain strength and spirit as the inquiry proceeded, but she nearly fainted at its close, and had to be tended by the Archbishop's physician.

Strict injunctions were given the physician to watch carefully over her, but he appeared to entertain no apprehensions as to her recovery.

Mourzouk was then brought in. His hands were fettered, and he was guarded by two halberdiers.

Glancing fiercely at his interrogators, he refused to answer any questions. The thumbscrew was applied, but without effect. Not even an expression of pain could be wrung from him.

As his obstinacy could not be overcome, he was ordered to be taken to the Tower, and placed in one of the underground dungeons.

Celestin was next introduced.

His evidence, in the opinion of the Chancellor and Hertford, furnished conclusive proof of the Queen's guilt. The marked favour she had shown Adrian Culpepper, which was notorious to the whole Court, convinced them that the intrigue had been of long duration.

There could be no doubt that Lady Rochford had assisted throughout the affair, as well as at the midnight meeting between the Queen and her lover, witnessed by Celestin and his fellow page.

When the examination was concluded, Cranmer informed his colleagues that he had written to the Bishop of Lincoln, instructing him not to make any communication respecting the matter for the present to the King, and in nowise to alarm Adrian Culpepper and the so-called Hugh Tilney; but to take all needful precautions to prevent their flight.

Paschal, the page, was also to be strictly enjoined to keep silence.

The Lord Chancellor and Hertford entirely approved of the course pursued by the Primate, and after some further deliberation, it was agreed that no proceedings should be taken till the King's return, when the dreadful disclosure should be made to him by Cranmer.

XVIII.

HOW THE DISCLOSURE WAS MADE TO THE KING.

HENRY'S homeward journey from Lincoln was unmarked by any event calculated to interfere with his enjoyment. Some strange whispers were heard among his attendants, but nothing reached his ears.

Whatever suspicions might be entertained as to the Queen's intimacy with Adrian Culpepper, a discreet silence was observed. The King's besotted attachment to his faithless consort formed the subject of some scurril jests among the grooms of the chamber and the pages—but that was all.

Acting upon Cranmer's instructions, the Bishop of Lincoln, who accompanied the royal pair on their return, kept strict watch over Adrian and Dereham, and menaced

Paschal with severe punishment if he committed the slightest indiscretion.

Thus all went on smoothly, and Henry's felicity was perfectly undisturbed.

When the royal party were within two days of London, the Bishop of Lincoln sent on Paschal with another warning letter to Cranmer. In this despatch he informed the Archbishop that a meeting of the Privy Council, presided over by Gardiner, had been held at the house of Sir John Gorstwick, one of the Primate's bitterest enemies, and that the King's sanction had been obtained —doubtless through the Queen's instrumentality—to his Grace's arrest, and committal to the Tower. To avert the threatened blow, he must be prepared to act with promptitude and decision.

Cranmer did not need this caution. He had already drawn up a statement of the Queen's misconduct, which he intended to lay before the King, immediately on his Majesty's return.

Full of satisfaction with the result of his progress—idolizing his fair young consort more than ever—and promising himself years of uninterrupted happiness with her, Henry arrived at Whitehall.

But he set out betimes next day, with all his attendants, for Hampton Court, so that Cranmer was constrained to follow him thither.

Great festivities took place that night at the Palace; and it was remembered, afterwards, that his Majesty was merrier than usual, and lavished more than his ordinary attentions on the Queen; pledging her repeatedly at the banquet—listening, enraptured, to her singing, and abstaining wholly from play, in order to devote himself to her.

The French and Imperial ambassadors were present, and to both he expatiated on his matrimonial felicity in terms that made them laugh internally, though they offered him their warmest congratulations.

Catherine's charms and witchery of manner quite justified the King's eulogies. Never had she looked more lovely—never had she been in higher spirits. Adrian gazed at her with admiration, but his heart was oppressed by a presentiment of ill.

Cranmer had arrived at the Palace, but forbore to present himself that night to the King. Norfolk and Gardener were told that he had come, and exulted. He had thrown himself into their hands. His arrest should take place on the morrow.

On the morrow, Dereham looked for the gratification of his long-delayed vengeance.

The morrow came — destined to be fatal to the Queen.

While kneeling at the altar in his splendid chapel, Henry, in a loud voice, gave thanks to heaven that, after the many strange accidents that had befallen his marriages, he had been blessed with a wife entirely conformed to his wishes.

When leaving the chapel, he desired the Bishop of Lincoln, who officiated, to prepare a public form of thanksgiving to heaven for bestowing upon him a Queen so loving, so dutiful, so virtuous.

The Bishop was saved from the necessity of making a direct response to this injunction by an usher, who advanced to inform his Majesty that the Archbishop of Canterbury craved an immediate audience of him.

"Where is he?" demanded Henry, frowning.

"In your private cabinet, sire," replied the usher.

The King went thither at once, and as he entered, the door was closed, and he was left alone with the Archbishop, whom he greeted very sternly.

"Your Grace has done well during my absence—mighty well," he said, in a mocking tone.

"I trust so, sire," replied the Archbishop.

He then knelt down, and presented a paper to the King.

"What is this?" cried Henry, very sternly. "A confession of thy heresies, and a prayer for pardon?—ha! An' I would, I cannot hinder Norfolk and Gardiner from preferring charges of heresy against thee before the Council."

Cranmer did not appear dismayed, but gazed sorrowfully at the wrathful monarch.

"Why dost look at me thus?" demanded Henry. "Dost pity me?"

"In faith, I do, sire, from the bottom of my heart," replied the Archbishop.

And he added, in tones calculated to impress the King, "Read that paper, I pray you, sire. It relates not to me, but to the Queen."

Henry was greatly startled.

"To the Queen! ha!" he exclaimed. "Would'st thou calumniate her, to defend thyself? If it be an accusation, I pronounce it false. The Queen is an angel of purity. Take back the paper."

"Sire," rejoined Cranmer, firmly, but sorrowfully, "it behoves you to read it. I would not inflict such pain upon you, but your honour is concerned."

"My honour! ha!" cried Henry.

"All that is stated in that document can be proved, sire. Would it could not be so! Suffer me, I beseech you, to retire while you peruse it."

The King motioned him to stay, and mustering all his firmness, opened the paper.

Dreadful was the shock he received, and very painful to witness. A strong man crushed is a piteous spectacle.

After vainly struggling with his emotion, the King was obliged to yield, and with a groan that seemed to issue from the very depths of his breast, he sank into a chair.

Cranmer thought it better to let his passion of grief subside, before offering him any sympathy.

After awhile, the King spoke in broken accents: "If this be true, Cranmer, there is not a man in my dominions more miserable than myself. I loved her, Cranmer—loved her better than I ever loved woman. I thought to have passed years of happiness with her; and now——"

Here his utterance was choked by emotion; but he soon recovered.

"I must think of her for a moment, before I cast her from my heart for ever. Oh, how beautiful she is, Cranmer—an incomparable creature! Helen of Greece was not fairer."

"Helen of Greece was not more false, sire," said the Archbishop. "Dwell not upon her perfections, but on her frailty."

"You are right, Cranmer," cried Henry, rousing himself. "Such weakness is unworthy of me. The suddenness of the blow overcame me. I have been deeply injured—but I will have vengeance. They shall all feel my wrath. Wot you if Dereham is in the palace?"

"He is, sire, and so is Adrian Culpepper. I have seen them both, this very morn."

"Ah! Adrian, whom I so blindly trusted!" cried Henry, as if stung to the quick by the thought. "More perfidious art thou than Norris! But thou shalt pay for thy treachery with thy life!"

He then struck a bell on the table; and when the usher entered, he said," "Bid Sir Anthony Browne come to me instantly."

Shortly afterwards, Sir Anthony appeared; and while making an obeisance, remarked, "Your Majesty seems disturbed. I hope nothing unpleasant has happened."

"You will learn what has happened anon, Sir Anthony," replied the King. "Meantime, let all the gates of the palace be closed. No one must be allowed to go forth on any pretence whatever. That done, bring the Queen's private secretary before me."

"Hugh Tilney, sire?"

"Hugh Tilney, or Francis Dereham—which thou wilt."

"Your Majesty alarms me!" cried Sir Anthony.

"See that no one else is alarmed—especially Adrian Culpepper. How hateful the name is to me!" exclaimed the King. "Bring hither the varlet I have mentioned."

"With a guard, sire?"

"With a guard."

XIX.

HOW DEREHAM WAS INTERROGATED BY THE KING.

Henry's injunctions were obeyed with so much promptitude that, within a quarter of an hour, Dereham was brought before him by Sir Anthony. The guard was left outside.

When arrested, Dereham exhibited no alarm; but instantly threw off all disguise, and astounded Sir Anthony and the halberdiers by the extraordinary change that he produced in his personal appearance.

The King instantly recognised him, and was highly incensed by the excessive audacity of his demeanour.

In reply to the Archbishop, the prisoner freely owned that he was Francis Dereham, and that he had assumed the name of Tilney for reasons of his own, which he was ready to explain.

The answers were given with so much boldness, that the King lost all patience.

"Dost think to brave us, fellow?" he cried. "To the point. Thou wert page to the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk?—ha!"

"Page to the Duchess," replied Dereham. "Husband to the Duchess's granddaughter, the Lady Catherine Howard."

"Husband!" ejaculated Henry.

"She gave me the right to call her wife," said Dereham, with imperturbable coolness. "I was betrothed to her."

Henry half rose upon his seat, but sat down again.

Sir Anthony Browne looked petrified with astonishment.

"I did not expect this avowal from thee, thou insolent traitor!" said Cranmer. "But I know it to be the truth."

"It *is* the truth," rejoined Dereham. "The contract between the Lady Catherine Howard and myself has never been annulled."

The King winced.

"Bring the interrogation to a close," he muttered to Cranmer.

"Why hast thou kept secret a matter of such deep import to his Majesty?" demanded the Archbishop.

"Because I wished for revenge," was the bitter reply.

"Revenge!—on whom?" roared Henry.

"On her who has broken her plighted troth to me; and on her favoured lover, Adrian Culpepper," replied Dereham. "This very day I intended to denounce them both to your Majesty, and make a full disclosure of all other circumstances."

"Thou wouldst not have saved thy life by so doing," observed Henry.

"I did not expect to save it, sire. I care not for life."

"One question more, and I have done with thee," said the King. "By answering it truthfully, thou may'st escape the rack."

"The rack has no terrors for me, sire. But I will answer truthfully."

The King then spoke aside to Cranmer, who presently addressed the prisoner.

"Since thou hast been in the Queen's household, has any familiarity passed between her and thee?"

"None," replied Dereham. "She treated me with scorn. All her love was for Adrian Culpepper."

The fiendish smile that played on the villain's countenance showed how much he enjoyed the torture he inflicted on the King.

"Shall I remove him, sire?" said Sir Anthony.

"Ay, take him to the Tower," replied Henry. "Place him in one of the underground dungeons. Let him be submitted to the question, ordinary and extraordinary. If he dies not under the torture, let him be hanged as a pirate, and his head be fixed on the spikes of London Bridge."

"Am I accused of piracy?" said Dereham.

"Piracy is among thy many offences," rejoined Cranmer. "It can be proved that thou hast served under Dragut, the noted corsair. Thy accusers are Mary Lassells and thy African slave, Mourzouk—both of whom are in custody."

"Hence with him!" cried the King, stamping his foot impatiently. "Let us hear how he bears the extremity of torture."

Thereupon, the guard was summoned, and the prisoner led forth.

XX.

HOW ADRIAN WAS ARRESTED BY THE EARL OF HERTFORD.

In spite of the caution observed by Sir Anthony Browne, Dereham's arrest became known immediately after it occurred, to Adrian Culpepper, who flew, at once, with the alarming intelligence, to the Queen's apartments.

Catherine was alone at the time with Lady Rochford. They were chatting gaily over the events of the previous evening, but their smiles were instantly dispelled by Adrian's looks.

"You bring bad news!" exclaimed the Queen.

"The worst that can be," he replied. "Dereham is arrested."

"Dereham arrested!" repeated Catherine, horror-stricken.

"He is now in the King's cabinet," replied Adrian.

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Catherine, wringing her hands in anguish. "The King will come hither anon,

and then what shall I say to him? His very looks will kill me. Lord Jesu, preserve me!"

And she sank on her knees.

Though almost equally terrified, Lady Rochford strove to comfort her.

Suddenly, the distracted Queen started to her feet, and grasping Adrian's hand convulsively, cried,—

"How have Henry's suspicions of Dereham been aroused?"

"I know not," rejoined Adrian. "But Cranmer is with him in the Cabinet."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Queen, despairingly. "Then all hope is gone. The fatal secret has been revealed. Why was I persuaded to act against Cranmer? In seeking his destruction, I have caused my own. He would have spared me, had I not joined his enemies."

"Do not distract yourself with these self-reproaches!" cried Adrian. "Let us consider what can be done."

"Nothing can be done," she rejoined. "I cannot avoid my fate. I must die upon the block. The King wills it so."

"Do not despair," said Adrian. "He has not yet condemned you."

"He will!—he will!" she exclaimed, shivering with terror. "He showed no mercy to Anne Boleyn. He will show no mercy to *me*. In the midst of all tenderness, I have felt that he would be inexorable, if I offended him. You, too, who have loved me, will be sacrificed to his wrath," she cried, throwing her arms round Lady Rochford's neck.

When this passionate outburst was over, she turned to Adrian, and said, in a very mournful voice,—

"You must go now, dear Adrian. The King must

not find you here, or you will be involved in my ruin, and that would aggravate my misery. 'Tis hard to part with you for ever, but it must be!"

He would have interrupted her, but she checked him by a look, and went on,

"In this world, we shall never meet again. May we meet hereafter! In bidding you an eternal adieu, Adrian, I will not attempt to conceal from you that you alone have possessed my heart. I forsook you—I flung aside your true love, that fails me not even now, at this hour of extreme peril—for a throne! But I have been punished. Amid all my splendour, I have been wretched—so wretched that death will be welcome! Farewell for ever! Nay, you must go."

"I obey," he replied, fervently pressing her ice-cold fingers to his lips. "Farewell, for ever!"

He was preparing to depart, when Lady Rochford stopped him with a warning gesture, and said, in a low voice,—

"I hear footsteps in the corridor; it may be the King. Hide yourself behind the arras."

Ere he could comply, the door was thrown open, and the Earl of Hertford came in, with his drawn sword in his hand. A party of halberdiers attended him.

Catherine and Lady Rochford regarded him with dread.

"Pardon this intrusion, madam," said Hertford, with a formal obeisance to the Queen; "I have a painful duty to perform."

Then, directing his steps towards Adrian, who had watched him anxiously, he said, "I have sought you vainly elsewhere, sir. But I felt sure of finding you here."

"Why here, my lord?" cried Adrian, sharply.

Hertford vouchsafed no reply, but said,—

"In the King's name, I arrest you."

"Arrested! in my presence!" exclaimed Catherine.

"By his Majesty's orders, madam," said Hertford.

"Of what offence am I accused?" demanded Adrian.

"You are charged with *lèse-majesté* and treason," replied the Earl.

"The charge is false!" cried Catherine. "He is incapable of treason. He is loyalty itself."

"This is imprudent," whispered Lady Rochford, who had vainly endeavoured to restrain her.

"Your testimony, I fear, will avail him but little, madam," observed Hertford, coldly.

"It would do so, were he not in the hands of his enemies," rejoined the Queen. "Heaven grant him a good deliverance!"

"I thank you, madam!" said Adrian. "My freedom from guilt will support me. I am ready, my lord."

With a last look at the Queen, he quitted the chamber, in the custody of Hertford, the halberdiers closing around him, as he stepped forth into the corridor.

XXI.

CATHERINE'S MESSAGE TO THE KING.

After Adrian had been removed, Catherine became almost frantic.

In vain, Lady Rochford represented to her that, at this terrible crisis, her safety depended upon calmness. She could not control herself even for a moment, but fell from one paroxysm into another.

Her distraction was so great, that Lady Rochford did not dare to summon any of the attendants, lest she should betray herself to them.

At last, she sank into a kind of stupor, from which she was aroused with difficulty.

"Oh! I have had a fearful dream," she cried, shuddering. "I dreamt that all was discovered, that Adrian was taken to the Tower, and that we were to follow him thither. But why do you look at me so? Was it a dream? or has it really happened?"

Lady Rochford did not dare to tell her the truth, fearing a relapse.

But Catherine began to collect her faculties, and then the reality burst upon her in all its horror.

Uttering a piercing cry, she flung herself despairingly upon a couch, burying her head in her hands.

Lady Rochford flew towards the door, to prevent intrusion; but ere she could reach it, Cranmer entered. She recoiled on beholding him.

"I must speak with the Queen," said the Archbishop.

"You cannot speak with her now, my lord," replied Lady Rochford. "You see her Highness's condition."

"Alas!" exclaimed Cranmer, compassionately; "I must stay till she revives."

"Who is it?" demanded Catherine, in a faint voice, and slightly raising her head.

"'Tis I, madam," replied Cranmer, approaching her. "I come to you from the King."

"Why does not the King come to me himself?" asked Catherine, rising from the couch, with Lady Rochford's assistance.

"Madam," said the Archbishop, solemnly, "you will not see the King again. Learn from me, if you know it

not already, that the wrongs you have done him—your contract with Francis Dereham—your infidelity with Adrian Culpepper—have all been discovered. 'Tis merciful in his Majesty to spare you his just reproaches. With what countenance could you meet his angry gaze?"

"I should not shrink from it, my lord, because I am not guilty of the crimes imputed to me," replied Catherine.

She then added earnestly, "I have never been faithless to him."

The Archbishop shook his head mournfully.

"Madam, I deem it right to tell you that Adrian Culpepper was seen to enter your chamber, privily, and at midnight, at Pontefract Castle," he gravely said. "He was there more than an hour; for the two pages, who saw him admitted by Lady Rochford, waited till he came forth."

"The witnesses were wrong in their suspicions," said Lady Rochford. "He came to see me, not the Queen."

"That is disproved by the evidence of the witnesses," rejoined Cranmer. "They distinctly beheld him, through the partly-opened door, bidding the Queen a tender adieu."

"Appearances are against me, my lord," replied Catherine, "but they are fallacious."

"You do not deny that Adrian was in your room at that late hour—long after his Majesty had retired to rest?"

"I do not deny it, my lord. But that does not prove my guilt."

"It is proof sufficient for the King," said Cranmer.

"But I can offer him such explanation as will remove his doubts," cried the Queen. "Adrian came to

remonstrate with me for retaining Dereham in my service. Was it not so?" she added, appealing to Lady Rochford.

"He came to urge my interference with your Highness," was the reply.

"That may be the fact, and yet it does not exculpate you, madam," observed the Archbishop.

"Has Adrian been examined?" demanded Catherine. "If so, he would corroborate my statement."

"He will be interrogated by the Privy Council, at the Tower, and put to the torture should he not confess his guilt," replied the Archbishop.

"Oh, spare him that, in pity!" cried Catherine. "He has no crime to confess!"

"Alas, madam! you know full well that I have no power to spare him. All rests with the King," said Cranmer, compassionating her anguish.

"I must see the King, my lord!" she cried passionately. "Adrian is wholly guiltless. I have done wrong —very wrong, in concealing my contract with Dereham. Let me suffer for the offence. If Henry puts me from him—nay, if he dooms me to death—I shall not murmur against the sentence. But as he is just, let him not punish the innocent.

"Go to him, my lord," she added, throwing herself at the Archbishop's feet. "Entreat him, by all the love he has borne me, to come to me. When he has heard my pleading in Adrian's behalf, he can deal with me as he deems fit."

Cranmer was greatly moved.

"Rise, madam," he said; "I will bear your message to the King, and will add my own entreaties to yours; but I cannot promise you a favourable result. His Majesty

is in a terrible state of mind. I shall say naught of your anxiety to save Adrian, since that might still further exasperate him, and prevent all chance of his compliance."

"Use your discretion, my lord," cried the unhappy Queen. "Bring him to me—that is all I ask."

With a sorrowful heart, and full of misgiving, the Archbishop departed on his mission.

XXII.

ADRIAN IS COMMITTED TO THE TOWER.

ADRIAN was taken by the Earl of Hertford to a large, tapestried chamber, in which sat the King beneath a canopy of state, surrounded by such members of the Privy Council as chanced to be staying at the Palace. Among them were the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, the Lord Chancellor, and Wriothesley.

All eyes were fixed upon the prisoner as he was brought in, except those of the King, who averted his gaze from him.

Adrian's firmness did not desert him on this trying occasion, though deep anxiety was visible on his countenance. Had he been permitted, he would have prostrated himself at the foot of the throne, but Wriothesley motioned him back.

"Sire," he exclaimed, "your Majesty has not a more loyal and devoted servant than myself; yet I am charged with treason. What act have I committed that can be so construed?"

Henry vouchsafed no reply.

"Thou art the most infamous of traitors!" interposed

Wriothesley. "Shamefully abusing the confidence reposed in thee by his Majesty, who hath treated thee with a favour infinitely beyond thy deserts, thou hast not hesitated to sully his honour! Thou art a monster of perfidy and ingratitude!"

"I should be the monster of ingratitude you represent me, my lord, if the charge made against me were true," replied Adrian; "but it is false! I repel it with indignation! It affects not me alone, but one whose name ought to be held sacred, and than whom a more virtuous princess doth not exist, as I would maintain, were I permitted, with my life. Oh, sire!" he added, turning towards the King, "believe not those accusations against your consort. They are made by her enemies, and are as malignant as they are false!"

"'Tis not for thee, who art the partner of her crime, to undertake her Highness's defence," said the Lord Chancellor. "Thy advocacy injures her cause."

"Learn, to thy confusion," said Wriothesley, "that we have proofs of thy guilt."

"Proofs? Impossible!" cried Adrian.

"We have witnesses, who saw thee in the Queen's chamber, at midnight, at Pontefract Castle," rejoined Wriothesley.

"Ha! does that confound thee, traitor?" exclaimed the King, turning his countenance suddenly upon him, and regarding him with a terrible look.

Adrian, indeed, was visibly troubled, and, for the moment, could make no answer.

"'Tis idle to put any further questions to him now, sire," said Wriothesley. "His silence shows that he cannot refute the charge. The rack will extort full confession of his crime."

"Do not think so!" cried Adrian. "I will die, protesting the Queen's innocence. Hath her Highness no friends here?" he added, looking round at the nobles. "Will no one defend her against these foul aspersions? Why is his Grace of Norfolk silent when the life of his niece is at stake?"

No answer was made to this appeal.

"'Tis plain you have condemned her already," said Adrian, mournfully.

"Take him hence!" cried the King. "His presence is hateful to me!"

"To the Tower, sire?"

"Ay—to the Tower," rejoined Henry.

Adrian was then removed.

"My lords," said Henry, "we will proceed no further in this painful business now. My mind is too much troubled. I were more than human if I could receive a blow, annihilating my matrimonial felicity, without feeling it deeply. I loved the Queen, as ye know, most tenderly; and I thought my love was reciprocated. Alas! I have been bitterly deceived. These regrets will quickly disappear, and give place to thoughts of that vengeance which my injured honour imperatively demands. Before I leave you, let me say that all implicated in the affair must be arrested without delay."

"Your injunctions shall be obeyed, sire," replied the Lord Chancellor. "We sympathise with you profoundly in your distress, and will take care that the injury done to your honour shall be fully avenged."

"I thank you, my good lords," replied Henry.

He then descended from the throne; and motioning Wriothesley to approach him, said, in a low voice, "The

old Duchess of Norfolk must have known of Dereham's betrothal to her granddaughter."

"'Tis almost certain, my liege."

"And Lord William Howard could scarce be ignorant of his niece's folly."

"Scarcely, sire."

"Let them forthwith be arrested, indicted of suspicion of treason, and committed to the Tower."

"It shall be done, sire," replied Wriothesley.

And he glanced significantly towards the Duke of Norfolk.

Henry understood him.

"No; I acquit his Grace of all complicity in the affair," said the King. "But look to the others. Let the Duchess's chests be searched—some criminatory paper may be found."

"Nothing shall be neglected, sire," replied Wriothesley.

Satisfied with this assurance, Henry quitted the council-chamber, and shut himself up in his private cabinet.

XXIII.

CRANMER BRINGS THE KING'S RESPONSE TO CATHERINE.

For some hours, Henry remained alone in his cabinet. At last, Cranmer was admitted, and the exceeding sternness of the King's countenance alarmed the Archbishop.

"I come from the Queen, sire," said Cranmer.

"Well!" cried Henry. "Hath she confessed her transgressions?"

"No, sire. And since I have spoken with her, my belief in her guilt has been greatly shaken—so far, at least, as Adrian Culpepper is concerned."

"You are not proof against her wiles, Cranmer."

"If ever affliction was real, sire, the unhappy Queen's is so. It passes my power to describe her anguish. Oh! if you could listen to her frenzied accents, they would move you!"

"Move me to what?" interrupted Henry, in a freezing tone. "Not to pity. No, Cranmer. She is a mass of perfidy and deceit. For three hours, I have been alone in this closet; and during that interval, I have reviewed, with as much calmness as I could command, all that has passed since I have known her, and I see plainly how completely I have been duped. There were hundred occasions when my suspicions ought to have been aroused; but I was blinded and infatuated by passion. All that is over now. The mask is torn off, and the false visage beneath it is revealed."

After a moment's pause, he went on.

"Thou hast a message to me from her! I knew it. She would try the effect of her enchantments on me, once more. 'Twould be vain, but I will not see her. 'Tis beneath my dignity to load her with reproaches for her perfidy; and I would not have her perceive how much I suffer—for I *do* suffer, Cranmer, stoic as you may deem me."

"Your wound bleeds inwardly, sire,—that I doubt not," rejoined the Archbishop. "I will not urge you to see her, though I came with that design. But let me give her a hope of mercy."

"Give her no hope, Cranmer," said the King, in an inexorable tone. "My heart is steeled against her."

"Divorce her, sire, but do not put her to death."

"That were not vengeance, Cranmer. Contracted to another, she married me. For that offence I might

divorce her, as I divorced Anne of Cleves. But since her marriage, she has been faithless. She must die!"

Cranmer fell on his knees before the King.

"She is too young to die, sire. Grant her some years for repentance. She will lead a new life. Her prayers will be ever for your Majesty."

Henry remained inexorable.

"I tell thee I have weighed the matter well, and can find no excuse for her," he said. "From the first, she has deceived me, and in deceit she has continued until now. I owe it to myself to avenge the wrongs done me. Her blood will not satisfy me. All who have aided her, or concealed her guilt, shall share her fate. The old Duchess of Norfolk, the Lord William Howard and his wife, will be committed to the Tower. If they perish on the block—as they will—Catherine will be the cause of their destruction. Urge me no more. Her offence is too heinous to be forgiven."

"Would you could see her, sire!" said the Archbishop, making a final effort, though he felt it would be unavailing.

"I will never see her again in life," replied Henry.

With a sad heart, Cranmer had quitted the Queen. With a far sadder heart, he returned to her.

During his absence, she had become somewhat calmer. A ray of hope visited her breast. The King had always yielded to her fascinations. If he came, she might regain her influence over him.

When Cranmer appeared, she was struck with mortal terror on perceiving that he was alone.

She flew towards him, and in an agonized voice exclaimed, "Will not the King come to me?"

"Alas! madam, I have failed," replied the Archbishop.

"Then I am lost!" she ejaculated.

And she fell back, insensible, in the arms of Lady Rochford.

XXIV.

THE UNDERGROUND DUNGEON.

BENEATH the inner walls of the Tower of London, at the time of which we treat, there existed a range of dungeons, in which State delinquents of inferior rank were confined.

These subterranean dungeons were solidly constructed of stone, but being below the level of the moat, they were exceedingly damp, and frightfully cold, and it is almost needless to say, were totally deprived of the light of day. The moisture that trickled down the walls, gathered in little pools on the paved floor of the cells, and added greatly to the misery of the captives. Yet some victims of the King's tyranny had languished in these horrible vaults for years, and were only released by death.

Into one of the worst of these dungeous Dereham was thrust; and as he gazed at the humid walls and slimy pavement, his stout heart almost gave way.

A lamp, a three-legged oak stool, and a rotten straw pallet, were provided for him—nothing more. The cold froze the very marrow within his bones, and he was obliged to move about constantly to keep his blood in circulation.

Several hours—how terribly wearisome they seemed! —elapsed before he received a visit from the gaoler, who brought him food and wine. It was Jerome, who had aided him in his attempt to liberate Cromwell.

Overjoyed at the sight of a friend, Dereham exclaimed, "Do you not recognise me, Jerome? When you beheld me last, I was disguised as a Franciscan friar."

"Ay, I thought it must be you, from the glimpse I caught of your features as you were brought here from the lieutenant's lodgings," replied the gaoler. "I am sorry to see you again. I wish I could render you any service, but time will not permit. To-morrow, you will be interrogated by the Council, and I much fear it will go hard with you. Meantime, take a cup of wine."

"I thank you, good Jerome!" cried Dereham, emptying the horn cup proffered him by the gaoler. "To-morrow must not find me here. I count on you to set me free. Fill the cup again, and then I shall be better able to talk to you. Would it were aqua vitæ! This is not the first time I have been imprisoned, though I was never treated so infamously before. The Corsicans would be thoroughly ashamed to clap a man into such a vile dungeon as this."

"Ay, it is a wretched hole, I must own," replied Jerome, commiseratingly. "But you are placed here expressly by the lieutenant's orders."

"It is not my intention to remain here long, good Jerome. You must aid me to fly, I will make it well worth your while. Would you guess from my looks that I have been a pirate?"

"I know not what a pirate is like," replied the gaoler, evasively.

"Well, I will not scruple to confess that I have been one, and while engaged in that hazardous profession, I obtained some rich prizes. I have wherewithal to make you wealthy—two large chests full of gold!"

"But your treasure will be seized now that you are committed to the Tower," remarked the gaoler.

"Fear nothing," said Dereham; "my chests are safely hidden. The King's myrmidons will never find them. You shall share the gold with me."

Jerome's eyes glistened.

"I know there is a secret outlet from the Tower," pursued Dereham; "you must be acquainted with it. Consequently, my escape will be an easy matter to you and your reward is certain."

"Are the chests large?" asked the gaoler, eagerly.

"Immense," replied Dereham.

"And filled with gold?"

"Each is full to the top."

"Hum!" exclaimed the gaoler, reflectively. "The affair is more difficult than you seem to imagine. It is true there *is* a secret outlet from the Tower; and it is also true that I am acquainted with it. But the place of exit is guarded by a dragon."

"The dragon must be put to sleep," observed Dereham.

"That can scarcely be accomplished," rejoined Jerome.

"Wherefore not?" inquired the other.

"Hear what I have to say, and judge. There is a secret passage under the moat, which issues forth at the postern gate, standing on the embankment on the summit of Tower Hill; but the outlet is barred by a strong door, of which Mauger, the headsman, who dwells in the postern, alone keeps the key."

"Ah, I perceive! Mauger is the dragon whose vigilance has to be overcome!" cried Dereham. "Well, we must give him a share of the treasure."

"I am not sure that he will take a bribe," rejoined the gaoler. "He is an obstinate churl, and like enough to refuse; but I will see what can be done with him. The plan must be executed to-night, for to-morrow it will be too late. I will about it at once. If I succeed with Mauger, you will see me again before midnight; if I come not, you will understand that I have failed."

"Talk not of failure, good Jerome," cried Dereham. "A golden key, like mine, ought to open any door. You may rely implicitly on what I have told you concerning my treasure-chests. I have gold enough to make both you and Mauger wealthy."

"I want no persuasion," replied the gaoler; "I am prepared to run all risks; but I cannot answer for Mauger."

With this, he went forth, locking the ponderous door upon the prisoner, who now bore his confinement more cheerfully, feeling certain of escape.

XXV.

DEREHAM SENDS A MISSIVE TO ADRIAN.

But his patience was exhausted before Jerome re-appeared.

Evidently the gaoler was prepared for flight, for he was wrapped in a cloak, beneath which he carried a dark lantern.

"Well done!" cried Dereham. "I see you have prevailed on Mauger to let us out."

"Ay, but it has been a hard matter to persuade him," said Jerome. "He misdoubted your account of the treasure; but I swore to him it was true."

"He will believe when he handles the gold," laughed Dereham.

"So I told him," observed the gaoler.

After extinguishing the lamp, they quitted the dungeon, the door of which was locked, as a precautionary measure, by Jerome.

They then tracked a long stone passage, lined with dungeons on either side, as was made manifest by the numerous massive doors.

Arrived at an angle in the passage, Jerome halted; and giving the lantern to his companion, stooped down, and, laying hold of a ring inserted in the pavement, raised a large square stone, that moved easily upon hinges.

A flight of steps was then disclosed; and the flag being restored to its place, they descended to a lower level.

"We are now beneath the moat," remarked Jerome, glancing at the roof of the tunnel, which was dripping with moisture.

A second flight of stone steps brought them to a landing-place; but here their further progress was barred by a stout oaken gate.

"He has neglected to unlock the gate!" cried Jerome, knocking against it.

Presently, a small wicket in the upper part of the gate was opened, and a gruff voice demanded who was there.

"Why, who should it be, except friends?" cried Jerome. "Open the door quickly."

"I have changed my mind," replied Mauger, whose harsh features could be imperfectly distinguished through the bars of the wicket. "I don't mean to let the prisoner out. I have no faith in his promises."

"You distrust me needlessly, good Mauger," cried Dereham, earnestly. "By everything sacred, I swear to you that I have spoken truth. You shall have a thousand marks in gold as your share. Will not that content you?"

"Perchance it might—if you had the money with you," replied the headsman.

"Come—come! agree at once. We waste time," cried Jerome, impatiently. "Open the gate instantly."

"Not so fast," rejoined Mauger. "I have reflected, I tell you. I will be neither art nor part in this plan. It is useless to talk to me further. Take back the prisoner to his dungeon."

"You are a stupid dolt to refuse his gold!" cried Jerome.

"I don't believe in it," rejoined the headsman. "But I believe in the halter, which would be my doom, were I to help him."

"Will nothing move you?" implored Dereham.

"Nothing," rejoined Mauger, shutting the wicket.

Half maddened, Dereham pattered furiously against the gate; but he only bruised himself, and was at last compelled to desist.

"If I could get at him for a moment, I would strangle him!" he cried, fiercely.

A mocking laugh resounded from the other side of the gate.

At last, the discomfited pair were compelled to retrace their steps; and it will be readily understood with what feelings of anguish and despair Dereham re-entered the dungeon, which now looked more dismal than ever.

Neither of them had spoken for some time; but when Jerome had lighted the lamp, he looked hard at the

prisoner, and said, in a wheedling tone, "'Tis a pity the treasure should be lost. Why not tell me where the chests are concealed?"

Dereham took no heed of the observation; but asked, "Has Adrian Culpepper been brought to the Tower?"

"He was brought hither two hours after your own arrival, and lodged in the Broad Arrow Tower, near the old palace," replied the gaoler.

"Would I could see him!" observed the other.

"Impossible," said Jerome. "But I will convey a message to him."

"I dare not trust you," rejoined Dereham. "Send the chaplain of the Tower to me, I pray you. I would fain make my shrift."

"You had best do so; for, most assuredly, you will have to submit to the question to-morrow."

"Ay; I have led a dog's life, that's certain," said Dereham, half speaking to himself. "Some men think me a renegade; but I will make a clean breast, and die in the true faith."

"It might ease your conscience to tell me where the treasure-chests are hidden," suggested Jerome. "The gold can do you no good now. You are sure to expire on the rack."

"Away! and send the chaplain to me!" cried Dereham, stamping impatiently on the ground.

Thinking it vain to tarry longer, the gaoler quitted the dungeon, and locked the door upon the prisoner, who seated himself on the oak stool, and became lost in bitter reflection.

He was still revolving the incidents of his wild and wayward life, when the door was unlocked, and the venerable chaplain of the Tower—who, it will be re-

membered, assisted at Cromwell's execution—entered the cell.

The holy man had to listen to a terrible confession. Many a sinner had he shrived, but never one who had been guilty of so many dark offences as were now detailed to him.

Nevertheless, having no doubt of the sincerity of the penitent, and being aware of the fearful peril in which he stood, he would not refuse him absolution.

Moved, also, by the prisoner's earnest entreaties, the good chaplain consented to take a missive to Adrian Culpepper.

Tearing a blank leaf from his breviary, he gave it, with a pencil, to Dereham, who traced a few hasty lines on the paper, and then folded it up.

"Give this to him, I pray you," he said to the chaplain. "He will know how to act."

"He shall have it to-morrow," replied the good man. "And I solemnly promise you that he alone shall read what you have written."

With this, the chaplain departed.

XXVI.

THE TORTURE-CHAMBER.

Not far from the dungeon in which Dereham was confined, but approached by a private passage from the lieutenant's lodgings, there was a chamber which was regarded with more dread than any other place in the Tower. It was more than double the size of any of the adjoining cells; and its walls and doors were so solid, that no sounds whatever could be heard outside.

From the arched stone ceiling was suspended a lamp;

and its light disclosed many horrible implements of torture—ropes, pulleys, thumbscrews, pincers, and, above all, a great, hideous-looking machine, that cumbered the floor.

That this dreadful engine was about to be used was evident, since Botolph, the headsman's assistant, and another equally brawny knave, were stationed near it—their muscular arms bared to the shoulder. Everything, indeed, betokened that an important prisoner was about to be interrogated.

Several members of the Privy Council were assembled. Among them were the Earl of Hertford, Wriothesley, and Sir Anthony Browne. In virtue of his office, Sir William Kingston was present, and Borlase, the chirurgeon of the Tower, was likewise in attendance.

Though so many persons were collected in the torture-chamber, no noise was heard, all observations being made in low tone, while almost every countenance wore a grave expression.

The members of the Council were provided with seats; and close beside them, at a small table, sat a secretary, with writing materials before him.

All being in readiness for the examination, Sir William Kingston signed to an attendant, and Mourzouk was brought in.

The African made a profound obeisance to the Council; but no question was put to him, and he was ordered to stand aside.

Scarcely had the slave withdrawn, than his master was introduced.

Dereham entered the torture-chamber, which he did not expect to quit with life, with a firm footstep.

His complexion was livid, but his deportment was

resolute. He saw at a glance all the terrible preparations that had been made for him, but he regarded them with perfect disdain.

He was placed before the Council by the guard, who left him standing near the secretary's table.

It had been arranged that the examination should be conducted by Wriothesley; but before it could commence the prisoner craved leave to say a few words; and permission being granted him, he spoke thus: "My lords, I desire to retract all I stated before the King. I was influenced at the time by malignant and vindictive feelings, and cared not what I avouched. The accusations that I brought against the Queen and Adrian Culpepper were false—utterly false. Her Highness is perfectly innocent, and I deserve any punishment you can inflict upon me for the foul calumnies I have uttered against her."

"By this device you hope to escape punishment," observed the Earl of Hertford, sternly. "But you are mistaken. We attach no credit to your disavowal. We know that the accusations are true, and cannot be disputed."

"You are resolved to find the Queen guilty, my lords, but I repeat she is innocent," rejoined Dereham. "As matter of justice to her Highness, I require that my present declaration be taken down and shown to the King."

"It shall be read to him," said Hertford; "but he will disbelieve it, as we do."

"I do not think so," said Dereham.

"We cannot be trifled with thus," said Wriothesley. "We will see whether the prisoner persists in his disavowal. Let him be placed on the rack."

Dereham smiled contemptuously.

"You must believe my dying words," he said; "and I will maintain the Queen's innocence to the last."

As he spoke, he was seized by Botolph and his comrade, who plucked off his doublet with great expedition, and bound him to the dreadful apparatus.

These proceedings were watched with suppressed rage by Mourzouk, and a glance was exchanged between him and Dereham.

The African seemed to understand his master's meaning.

The Earl of Hertford now arose, and stepped towards the engine on which the unfortunate prisoner was stretched.

Even in this extremity, Dereham's courage did not desert him. He eyed the Earl boldly.

"What would you with me?" he haughtily demanded.

"I would spare you the torture," replied Hertford. "Recall your declaration, and you shall be released."

"I would not preserve my life on such conditions," rejoined Dereham. "I lied in what I said before, but I speak truth now. Hear me, all of you—the Queen is innocent!"

"Fool!" exclaimed Hertford, signing to the tormentors to turn the engine.

But ere he could be obeyed, Mourzouk sprang forward, with lightning swiftness, and snatching the poniard that dangled at Hertford's side from its sheath, plunged it into Dereham's heart; and then buried it in his own breast, falling upon his master's body.

Both blows were almost instantaneously mortal.

When the surprise and consternation caused by this dreadful occurrence had somewhat subsided, the Earl of Hertford exclaimed, "The villain has escaped us, but he

must not escape the King's judgment. Hew off his head, and fix it on the great gate of London Bridge."

XXVII.

HOW CATHERINE WAS TAKEN TO THE TOWER.

CATHERINE'S disgrace, and the arrest of Dereham and Adrian Culpepper, had, of course, become known to all the inmates of the Palace at Hampton Court, and much sympathy was felt for the fair young Queen, though no one dared utter a word in her favour. It would have been perilous to express a doubt as to her guilt.

She was now a prisoner in her own apartments, and a guard was placed at the door. Her household was dismissed, and only a few female attendants were allowed her. But she was not deprived of the companionship of Lady Rochford, who, being regarded as her instigator and accomplice, had been placed under arrest, and was, consequently, a prisoner like herself.

With characteristic rapacity, Henry took possession of all the presents he had made her—jewels, ornaments, and rich dresses—and left her no means of rewarding her attendants. She had to submit to repeated interrogations by the Council, but no acknowledgment of guilt could be wrested from her, though she freely admitted her contract to Dereham.

Throughout all these examinations, Catherine resolutely maintained that she had never wronged the King, and her assertions were supported by Lady Rochford, who affirmed, as was the fact, that she had not quitted the Queen for a moment during her interview with Adrian at Pontefract Castle.

But little credit was attached to their asseverations.

The Council was determined to find them both guilty; and a bill of attainder was prepared against the Queen and her accomplice.

Meantime, the vindictive monarch's instructions to Wriothesley had been carried into effect.

It chanced that the old Duchess of Norfolk was labouring under a severe illness that confined her to her room; but, notwithstanding her indisposition, she was arrested, and at once committed to the Tower. Her goods were confiscated. Plate of considerable value, and money, to the amount of two thousand marks, were seized in the King's name. The old Duchess behaved with great spirit, and stoutly expressed her belief in Catherine's innocence. "She is sacrificed that the King may take another wife," she said to Wriothesley. "With my consent she should never have wedded him. Do with me what you please. I cannot expect better treatment than was shown to the martyred Countess of Salisbury."

Lord William Howard's mansion at Reigate, which had been erected on the site of the old Priory, and is still in existence, was plundered in a similar manner; all his property being sequestered by the emissaries of the Council sent to arrest him and his wife.

By these spoliations, only to be paralleled by the proceedings of an Oriental despot, a large sum was added to the royal coffers.

But Henry derived but little satisfaction from thus indulging his vengeance. He suffered more than he had ever done before. He was satiated with the charms of Anne Boleyn, when he destroyed her to make way for Jane Seymour; but he was passionately enamoured of Catherine Howard, at the moment when he was forced

by a sense of injured honour to cast her from him, and doom her to death. Though convinced that she had betrayed him, he could not banish her image from his breast, and tormented himself by recalling her thousand attractions. Lest he should yield to a momentary weakness, he kept inflexibly to his resolution not to see her.

Quitting Hampton Court on the day when the terrible discovery was made, he proceeded to Greenwich. But the change in his manner was very perceptible. He was moodier than ever, and his brow was constantly sombre.

He was persuaded by the leaders of the Protestant party to visit Anne of Cleves, in the hope that a reconciliation might take place; but, though the divorced Queen condoled with him upon his misfortune, she produced no impression upon him. To Anne's credit, it may be mentioned that she did not exult in her rival's fall, but, on the contrary, commiserated her; feeling thankful, no doubt, that she had escaped a like fate.

Speculations were rife among the courtiers as to whether Henry would marry again, and who would be the next object of his choice. Overhearing some of these discussions, Will Sommers remarked, "Wait till Catherine Howard is disposed of, and you will see!"

"She must be a widow," observed one of the interlocutors.

"Certes!" rejoined the jester,—"twice a widow. I could tell you her name, but you will blab."

"Handsome?" inquired another speaker.

"Not so handsome as the present Queen, but handsome enough."

"I know whom you mean," said the first speaker; "'tis the Lady Catherine Parr."

A prisoner, as we have said, in her splendid apartments, with no one to console and counsel her but Lady Rochford, Catherine passed the most miserable week of her brief life at Hampton Court.

She was still Queen; but what remained to her of her former state and splendour? For her there were no more pageants, no more brilliant assemblages, no more magnificent banquets. The high-born dames who had attended upon her had deserted her. The pages and ushers who thronged her ante-chamber were gone. Had it all been a dream? She would have thought so, but for the terrible reality that confronted her.

Adrian, too, was gone. She would soon be near him, in the Tower; but stone walls, solid as those of a tomb, would separate them.

No message came to her from the King, and she had ceased to hope for mercy from him.

At the end of a week, she was removed to Sion House, a large, gloomy-looking mansion situated on the banks of the Thames, and belonging to the King, but never occupied by him.

Her departure from Hampton Court was conducted with the utmost privacy, and she passed through the gardens to her barge without raising her eyes towards the windows of the Palace, at which many of the household were collected. All the beholders were weeping.

Sion House looked dreary and desolate, yet she preferred it to Hampton Court, since she was allowed by Master John Gates, the keeper, to roam about its neglected state-apartments.

But she did not remain there long. An order from the Council that the Queen and Lady Rochford should be taken to the Tower, was brought to Gates by the

Duke of Suffolk and Wriothesley, and when this came, they knew their fate was sealed.

The fatal sentence had, in fact, been pronounced by the Peers and Commons, and the death-warrant had only to be signed by the King.

The shades of evening were deepening the gloom of the melancholy woods surrounding Sion House, as Catherine and her attendants proceeded to the low banks of the river where her barge was moored. A small guard of halberdiers headed the sad procession, and another brought up the rear. The Duke of Suffolk and Wriothesley marched in front.

To Catherine, it appeared as if she were taking leave of the world. In her eyes, the very trees had a mournful look, and in their whispering seemed to bid her farewell.

Very loth was she to quit their friendly shade, and would have lingered beneath them, if she could, to the last. Why could she not expire at that moment? Why could not the rest be spared her?

Lady Rochford noticed her wistful looks at the trees, and guessed what was passing in her breast. She, too, was oppressed by sorrowful thoughts, and felt as if she were marching to the grave.

At last they issued from the grove, and the darkling river opened upon them.

None, except those that were with her, witnessed the young Queen's embarcation, but her step did not falter as she entered the barge. She begged to be left alone with Lady Rochford, and her wishes were complied with. No standard floated at the prow—no scutcheon proclaimed that a royal personage was within the vessel —so it swept unnoticed down the current.

But the onward course of the barge was delayed for a few minutes as it neared Lambeth, and the brief stoppage enabled her to catch a glimpse of the ancient mansion in which she had passed so many happy hours —happy, indeed, by contrast.

Straining her eyes through the gloom, she could just distinguish the gray old pile amid the trees. What dire calamity she had brought on that ancestral home! She, who had been sheltered there, had caused its ruin—had sent the spoiler to its gates, to plunder it, and drive forth its inmates. She had imperilled the life of the aged relative who had loved her, and watched over her with all a mother's fondness.

These reflections caused her such bitter self-reproach and anguish, that she fell into a paroxysm of grief, from which she did not recover till the barge had passed through the mid-arch of London Bridge, and was approaching Traitors' Gate.

The arrival of the illustrious prisoner at the Tower was expected. No sooner was the signal given by the sentinels, than the massive wooden gates guarding the private entrance to the fortress swung open, and closed again as the bark passed through them.

Torchlight flashing on the low-browed arches, and on the black turbid water, revealed Sir William Kingston standing with a guard of halberdiers on the stone steps of the landing-place.

The Lieutenant of the Tower bowed profoundly as he proffered his hand to assist the Queen in mounting the humid steps, and his looks expressed the deep commiseration he felt for her.

"Alas, madam!" he said, "I never thought to meet you thus."

"You might have expected to do so, Sir William, when you heard I had become Queen," she rejoined. "From the throne to the Tower is but a step."

A moment afterwards, she inquired, anxiously, "Whither am I to be taken, Sir William? I must not be separated from Lady Rochford."

"You shall not be deprived of her attendance, madam," he replied, with unaffected kindness. "You will have nothing to complain of while you are in my custody. You shall be lodged in the best apartments of the old palace, and Lady Rochford shall remain with you."

"I thank you from my heart, Sir William!" she cried.

And she instantly communicated the satisfactory intelligence to Lady Rochford, who had joined her.

XXVIII.

THE OLD PALACE IN THE TOWER.

THE old palace in the Tower, whither Catherine and her attendant were conducted by the lieutenant, was situated at the south-east angle of the fortress, and with its courts and garden occupied the whole of the space between this side of the donjon and the ballium wall.

Approached by an embattled gateway, the palace consisted of a mass of irregular buildings, all of which have been swept away. Its chief features were a large hall and a long gallery, the latter standing between the inner court and the privy gardens.

The apartments, which were seldom occupied by the King, were hung with old faded tapestry, and had a very gloomy air, but to the unfortunate Queen and her companion, who had expected imprisonment in one of the towers, they appeared delightful.

By the consideration of the lieutenant, they were allowed free range of the palace, and even to take exercise in the privy gardens.

Still further indulgence was shown the unhappy Queen. She and Lady Rochford had the privilege, seldom accorded to prisoners, however illustrious, of attending mass in the chapel in the White Tower.

A private passage communicating with the donjon enabled them to repair thither, without attracting observation. Thus, through the kindness of the lieutenant, who might, from his conduct, have incurred the King's displeasure, Catherine suffered none of the worst miseries of captivity.

From Sir William Kingston she learnt the fate of Dereham. The lieutenant did not, however, inform her that the villain's head was then bleaching on the gate-towers of London Bridge.

From the same source she ascertained that Adrian Culpepper still lived, though he had undergone the torture. He was confined in the Broad Arrow Tower—a fortification almost facing the palace, and that could be distinctly seen from the windows of the long gallery. The lieutenant had not received the warrant for his execution, but it might arrive at any time.

"I was present at his interrogation," said Sir William. "He exhibited the greatest constancy. Nothing could be wrested from him tending in the slightest degree to criminate your Highness."

"I never doubted it, Sir William," said Catherine. "He is too brave, too loyal, too good to utter a falsehood!'

Not long after this conversation with the lieutenant, the Queen and Lady Rochford repaired to the great gallery; and as they paced to and fro, they cast many an

anxious glance at the grated windows of the Broad Arrow Tower, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the prisoner—but in vain. Nothing could be seen of him.

Next day, however, Catherine was more fortunate. She had stationed herself in the deep embrasure of a window commanding the Broad Arrow Tower, and it soon became evident that she had attracted the prisoner's attention.

A figure could just be distinguished behind the bars. Her heart told her it was Adrian. He made a sign, showing that he recognised her, and she returned it. But she did not dare to remain long at her post, lest she should be observed.

When she again beheld him, he made a different signal to her; but though he repeated it, she could not understand its import; nor could Lady Rochford assist her. Oh, that she could have exchanged a word with him!

We have said that the Queen and her companion were allowed to attend mass in the chapel in the White Tower. They went thither on that evening, and, entering the gallery, knelt down as they were wont to do on cushions placed near one of the arched openings of the gallery above the nave.

The interior of the little fane, with the massive stone pillars lining the aisles, was illuminated by the tapers burning at the altar, but the gallery was almost buried in gloom.

Catherine was engaged in prayer, when she heard her name softly whispered.

Could it be the voice of Adrian?

Slightly turning her head, but without altering her posture, she beheld a dark figure bending towards her, and no longer doubted.

"Adrian!" she murmured. "You here?"

"Yes," he replied, in the same low tone. "I have been brought hither by my gaoler, Jerome, whose aid I have secured. But my time is brief. Listen to me calmly, Catherine. I have devised a plan to save you from your threatened fate. 'Tis fraught with difficulty, but, with heaven's help, it will succeed. Take this phial," he added, giving her one, which she instantly concealed within her bosom. "'Tis a powerful narcotic, which I have procured from Borlase, the chirurgeon, and will produce a sleep that cannot be distinguished from death."

"I will drink it," she rejoined. "But what will follow?"

"On your return to sensibility, you will be without the walls of the Tower, and out of the tyrant's reach," he rejoined. "In St. Peter's Chapel, where Anne Boleyn is interred, a grave will be opened, and a coffin placed within it; but the coffin will be empty."

"Ah!" she exclaimed.

"Have no fear," he rejoined. "I can trust those I have employed. Not till the work is done will they he rewarded."

"And you, Adrian! You will escape?"

"Think not of me," he returned. "I shall die happy in the conviction that I have saved you. Were I set free, I could not live long. My frame is shattered by that dreadful engine. Death will be a release from suffering. And it is not far off."

"Oh, Adrian!" she ejaculated.

"The warrant has arrived. To-morrow, I shall be taken to Tower Hill. Think of me sometimes, Catherine."

"While life lasts, you will never be absent from my thoughts, Adrian. But I am sure I shall quickly follow you."

He did not say farewell. His strength was failing him, and he glided away like a phantom.

Catherine required all Lady Rochford's support as she returned to her apartments in the palace.

XXIX.

ANOTHER TRAGEDY ON TOWER HILL.

NEXT morn, a melancholy procession took its way from the fortress to Tower Hill.

Its progress was necessarily slow, for he who was about to suffer could scarcely drag along his lacerated limbs. His crime had not been proclaimed, but it was known and much talked about, and curiosity brought forth a vast number of City dames, anxious to behold the victim of the King's jealous fury.

On Adrian's appearance, great commiseration was expressed for him, especially by the female portion of the assemblage, who denounced Henry's cruelty in sending such a handsome gallant to the block. The barbarous treatment he had experienced from the tormentors formed likewise the subject of much indignant comment.

Even now, Adrian retained sufficient of his former symmetry to show what a model of grace he had been: while his features, though cadaverous and stamped with pain, still preserved their regularity of outline.

He bore himself as stoutly as his enfeebled condition would permit; but every now and then the excruciating agony he endured compelled him to halt; and it was at such times that the sympathy of the City dames was most warmly manifested.

On one of these occasions he was so much moved, that he could not help addressing a few grateful words

to those who pressed around him, assuring them that their pity was not undeserved, since he was guiltless of the crime imputed to him.

"If that be, sooth," cried one of the kind-hearted dames, "the young Queen must needs be innocent!"

"She *is* innocent!" exclaimed Adrian, earnestly. "Think not otherwise of her!"

"Heaven grant her innocence may appear before it is too late!" cried another woman.

Amid their tearful adieux, Adrian moved slowly on.

His mind was at ease in regard to Catherine. She would live—would owe her life to him. Dying, he would baulk the tyrant's vengeance.

Before quitting his prison on that fatal morn, he had had a long conference with Jerome, to whom he had confided his hazardous scheme for saving the Queen. The gaoler assured him that all arrangements had been made, and that the plan would be faithfully carried out.

"I have hired Botolph and Montfort, two trusty varlets, for the business in St. Peter's Chapel; and Master Borlase, the chirurgeon, from whom I procured the sleeping potion, with Dame Agnes, his wife, have undertaken the rest. They could not resist the rich reward offered them. You may die content—the Queen will be saved!"

"Enough!" cried Adrian. "You are certain of your reward."

"Ay," replied Jerome; "and a princely reward it is! The two chests of gold, hidden by Dereham, are to be divided between me and Master Borlase. We shall both be wealthy. As soon as I can do so with safety, I shall throw up my hateful employment, and quit the Tower."

When the dread summons came, and Adrian was taken by the lieutenant and the officials down to the court, he cast a last look at the windows of the gallery; but no Catherine was visible.

She heard the dismal tolling of the bell; she heard the tread of the halberdiers, and the orders given them by the lieutenant; but she had not the courage to look forth, till all became silent.

Then he was gone.

The crowd gathered round the scaffold was not nearly so great as that which assisted at Cromwell's execution; and it was animated, as we have shown, by very different feelings.

When he arrived at the fatal spot where his sufferings were to terminate Adrian was so much exhausted that he could not mount the steps of the scaffold without the lieutenant's assistance. But he bore his anguish with the resolution of a martyr, and did not utter a groan.

As he stood before the assemblage, with the stamp of death on his countenance, his looks giving proof of his intense suffering, profound expressions of sympathy were heard on all sides.

By a supreme effort, he advanced to the railing of the scaffold, and glancing round, exclaimed, in tones that carried conviction of their truth to all hearers, "My friends, I die innocent! Pray for me! Pray for the Queen!"

Sobs and groans followed this address.

The old palace of the Tower—Catherine's place of imprisonment—could be distinguished from the scaffold.

One look in that direction—one thought of her—and he knelt down by the block.

His head was stricken off at a blow, and when held

up by Mauger, a thrill of horror pervaded the assemblage, and shrieks were heard.

While the crowd dispersed, Adrian's dying declaration was discussed, and much pity was expressed for the poor young Queen.

A group of female gossips was standing at no great distance from the scaffold, when one of them exclaimed,—

"If the Queen be really innocent, and the King beheads her, he will deserve——"

"Hold your peace, woman!" interrupted a sinister-looking personage. "You talk treason. The King knows she is guilty. His vengeance is only half glutted. Catherine Howard will die by the same axe as Adrian Culpepper—ay, before the blood-stains are effaced from it."

"Jesus!" ejaculated the woman. "'Tis Mauger himself!"

XXX.

THE SLEEPING POTION.

WHILE the tragic event just described took place on Tower Hill, Catherine was alone with Lady Rochford, and in a state of mind bordering on frenzy.

Her imagination, powerfully excited, had conjured up the dreadful scene. She was on her knees before a crucifix, trying to pray, when she suddenly started up, and with a look that froze her companion with terror, exclaimed, "Hark! did you not hear that sound? The axe has fallen!"

Lady Rochford attributed this idea to excitement; but certain it was, that at that moment the fatal blow was dealt.

After this, the Queen became somewhat calmer, and so continued until the headless trunk of him she had loved was brought back to the Tower.

Agnes, the wife of Borlase, the chirurgeon, acquainted her with this sad circumstance; and when retiring, said, in a significant tone, "My husband bade me say to you, madam, that no time should now be lost in fulfilling the poor young gentleman's dying wishes. We are ready."

"I thank you," replied the Queen. "I will no longer delay."

Again she was alone with Lady Rochford.

"You heard what Agnes said?" Catherine observed to her companion.

"I did," replied Lady Rochford. "And I am of her opinion."

Summoning up all her resolution, she took the phial from her bosom.

"It may be poison," she exclaimed, with a shudder.

"If I thought so, I would ask you to reserve part for me," said Lady Rochford. "But I am sure it is only a sleeping-potion. Drink it without fear. 'Twill deliver you."

"But you will perish," observed Catherine. "No, no! I will not drink it. We will die together."

"That must not be," said Lady Rochford, firmly. "'Twill cheer me at the last to think you have escaped. Remember your promise to Adrian. Do not hesitate."

Yielding to these exhortations, Catherine placed the phial to her lips, and swallowed its contents.

"'Tis done!" she cried, flinging it away.

Just at the moment, the door opened, and Sir William Kingston entered the chamber accompanied by the old Duchess of Norfolk.

The Duchess had been attainted, and condemned to death, but the execution of the sentence was deferred. Like Catherine, she was confined within the palace of the Tower, but in a different part of the building, and she had not hitherto been allowed to hold any communication with the Queen.

On seeing her aged relative, Catherine started up, and threw herself on her knees before her.

"Heaven brings you to me at this moment, dear grandam," she exclaimed. "Forgive me, oh, forgive me for all the ill I have brought upon you! It has been among the sharpest of my afflictions, that you should suffer for my fault."

"I do forgive you, my dear child," said the Duchess, raising her. "I do not attribute the grievous wrongs I have endured to you. The crime with which you have been charged, and which I know to be false, has served as a pretext for the tyrant's ruthless treatment of me. We are both his victims."

"Madam," interposed the lieutenant, "I can make every allowance, but I must pray you to constrain your feelings. I consented to this parting interview between you and the Queen, in the hope that it might afford some consolation to you both."

"You have done me a greater kindness than you wot, Sir William," said Catherine, gratefully. "'Tis an inexpressible satisfaction to me to behold the Duchess once more. She has been the best friend I ever had on earth; and, had I listened to her counsels, all would have been well. I should not be here—nor would she —alas!—alas!"

"Grieve not for me, dear Catherine," said the Duchess.

"What matter if my life be shortened by a few months? But that you should be cut off in your prime by this remorseless tyrant, 'tis sad—'tis very sad!"

"Madam, I must again check you," said the lieutenant. "The King's name must not be mentioned in my presence, save with fitting respect."

Then, turning to Catherine, he added, "Very painful duties are enforced upon me by my office; but, however painful they may be, I must not shrink from them."

"I understand, Sir William," said the Queen, composedly. "You have come to bid me prepare for death."

"'Tis so, indeed, madam," he replied sorrowfully. "To-morrow, you and Lady Rochford will bid adieu to the world."

"I shall be ready," said Lady Rochford.

Catherine made no reply. She could no longer struggle against the effect of the powerful narcotic.

"Look to the Queen!" cried the Duchess, alarmed by Catherine's deadly pallor. "You have killed her by this sudden announcement, Sir William."

"No, no, it is not that!" said Catherine, sinking into Lady Rochford's arms.

A terrible suspicion crossed the lieutenant as the Queen was borne to a couch.

"What ails you, madam?" he inquired, anxiously.

But as she did not answer, and as her symptoms became each moment more alarming, he rushed out of the room to summon aid.

When he returned, in a few minutes, with Borlase, he found Catherine extended on the couch, apparently lifeless, with Lady Rochford kneeling beside her.

The melancholy group was completed by the old Duchess, who stood contemplating the pallid features of

her granddaughter with an expression that had more in it of joy than of sorrow.

"Heaven be thanked, she hath escaped the tyrant's vengeance!" she exclaimed, almost in a tone of exultation, as the lieutenant and his companion drew nigh.

"Dead!" ejaculated Kingston, appalled by the spectacle. "I cannot believe it. Recall her to life, Borlase, or we shall all pay dearly for the terrible mischance."

Stepping forward, the chirurgeon placed his hand upon the Queen's heart, and declared that it beat no longer.

A feather was then laid on her lips, but it remained motionless.

These proceedings were watched with intense anxiety by the lieutenant.

"It passes my skill to revive her, Sir William," said Balthazar. "The spark of life is extinguished."

"What has caused her death?" demanded Kingston.

"Poison, unquestionably!" replied the chirurgeon.

The lieutenant looked aghast.

"If this be so, you must have had a hand in it," he said to Lady Rochford. "Whence did she obtain the poison?"

"She had it with her," was the reply.

"'Tis a most untoward circumstance!" said Kingston, who was greatly troubled. "How shall I communicate it to his Majesty?"

"Would that the task devolved on me!" cried the old Duchess. "I would fain be present when he learns the news!"

Just then, a fresh personage appeared on the scene. It was the Archbishop of Canterbury. He instantly perceived that something terrible had happened.

"What ails the Queen?" he exclaimed. "I have been sent by his Majesty to receive her last confession."

"Your Grace has come too late!" rejoined the Duchess of Norfolk, pointing to the motionless form. "This is all that remains of Catherine Howard, somewhile Queen of England!"

"Alas! that I should find her thus!" ejaculated Cranmer.

"Pity her not!" said the Duchess. "Her troubles are over! Not even your royal master can molest her now!"

"How did she die?" inquired Cranmer.

"From some subtle poison, which she must have had concealed about her person, my lord," replied Borlase.

"Not half an hour ago she was alive, and conversing with the Duchess of Norfolk," said Kingston. "But when I warned her that her last hour was near at hand, she sank."

"Perchance the shock killed her?" observed the Archbishop.

"Not so, your Grace; 'twas poison!" said Borlase, confidently.

"This will be ill news for the King," remarked Cranmer.

"Ay, marry will it!" said the lieutenant. "And I like not to be the bearer of it."

"I will relieve you from that duty, good master lieutenant," said Cranmer. "I will return at once to Greenwich, where I left his Majesty, and tell him what I have seen and heard."

"I humbly thank your Grace," replied Kingston. "I pray you to assure his Majesty that the thing hath happened from no neglect of mine. 'Tis as vexatious to me

as it can be to him. I shall await his orders; but, meanwhile, all such preparations as may be necessary shall be made. I will attend your Grace to the gates."

"No," replied the Archbishop; "you have business, which I will not interrupt. I know not what the King may determine upon; but you will hear ere long."

So saying, he bowed gravely to the Duchess and Lady Rochford, and departed, the lieutenant attending him to the door.

"Borlase," said Kingston, beckoning the chirurgeon to him, "I am sore perplexed by this unlooked-for occurrence!"

"I do not wonder at it, Sir William. Can I lend you aid? In my humble opinion, the deceased Queen ought not to be disturbed in any way till you receive his Majesty's orders. With your permission, I will send my wife to watch over the body."

"Do so," replied the lieutenant.

"It may be that his Majesty will enjoin the immediate interment," pursued the wily chirurgeon. "The coffin is ready. Shall I cause it to be brought hither?"

"Ay," replied Kingston; "and let the corpse be placed within it."

"Just as it is?" asked Borlase.

"Ay; just as it is," responded the lieutenant. "In anticipation of to-morrow, I have already directed Botolph to dig a grave in St. Peter's Chapel."

"I will bid him use despatch," said Borlase. "So that any orders you receive may be promptly executed."

"'Tis well," said the lieutenant.

This colloquy was overheard by Lady Rochford, who was listening attentively.

When it was ended, the lieutenant went up to her.

"I can hold out no hopes, madam, that your execution will be postponed, owing to this sad occurrence," he said.

"I did not think it would be," she replied. "All I ask is to be allowed to pass the brief remnant of my life near her whom I have loved and served."

"That request is granted," said Kingston.

He then proceeded to the old Duchess of Norfolk, who was kneeling by the couch, and, touching her shoulder, said, "I am sorry to disturb your Grace, but you must now return with me to your own chamber."

"I am ready to attend you," she replied, rising.

Kissing Catherine's pallid cheek, she followed him with a firm step out of the chamber.

Borlase lingered for a moment.

"All goes well," he muttered to Lady Rochford. "I will send my wife instantly to your ladyship."

XXXI.

THE MIDNIGHT EXEQUIES IN ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL.

It was midnight, and, by the King's command, sad and solemn rites were performed in St. John's Chapel, in the White Tower.

Never had a scene so striking, so impressive, been presented in that sacred structure. In front of the altar, which was fully dressed and lighted by many tapers, was placed an open coffin on a bier. In it lay the motionless and apparently lifeless form of the young Queen, still arrayed in the vestments she had worn when she sank in death-like insensibility. On her breast was laid a silver crucifix.

The coffin was not sculptured, like that of a royal

personage, nor adorned by a 'scutcheon, but it reposed on a black velvet pall, deeply bordered with silver.

Near it stood a priest, habited in a black stole, sprinkling the body with holy water, and reciting the antiphon, *"Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine, Domine, quis sustenebit?"*

Another priest was stationed at the altar, and an acolyte was swinging a thurible, that filled the chapel with powerful odour.

Around were a few kneeling figures, and among them were the Duchess of Norfolk, Lady Rochford, and Agnes. The old Duchess had so earnestly besought Sir William Kingston for permission to attend the ceremonial, that he could not refuse her.

The round, massive columns, with the semicircular arches springing from them, and the coved ceiling of the chapel, illumined by the tapers, formed an admirable frame to the striking picture at the altar.

In the gallery were three spectators of the scene, all of whom gazed at it with strangely-mingled feelings.

Mass was then said, and the *Dies Iræ* chanted, after which the priest took the aspersorium from the acolyte, and again thrice sprinkled the body. These sacred observances derived additional solemnity from the occasion, but their length alarmed Borlase, who was stationed behind one of the pillars.

During the prayer that followed, he crept softly forth, and, approaching Lady Rochford, whispered anxiously,—

"'Tis to be hoped this ceremonial will soon be over. That sprinkling with holy-water may revive her."

Lady Rochford entertained the same fear, and trembled inwardly.

At last, their apprehensions were allayed. The prayer

was over, and the concluding verses were chanted by the priests, as they gathered around the bier:—*"In paradisum deducant te Angeli, in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres, et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Hierusalem."*

Amid the profound silence that ensued, two monks of the Order of St. Jerome, having their hoods drawn over the brow, advanced with noiseless footsteps towards the bier.

These were the bearers, who had remained in one of the side aisles during the solemn ceremonial.

"Whither shall we take the coffin?" inquired one of them, in a low tone, of Borlase.

"To the apartment in the Palace whence ye brought it," replied the chirurgeon. "You will wait to transport it to St. John's Chapel."

The monk inclined his head, in token of acquiescence.

Just then, when he deemed all danger over, a noise at the back of the chapel startled the chirurgeon, and, looking round, to his astonishment and dismay, he beheld the King, attended by the lieutenant and Cranmer.

As it was evident that Henry was about to approach the coffin, all those near it, as well as those who had been kneeling in the nave, withdrew into the aisles.

Borlase, who had retreated behind one of the pillars, looked on with deepest anxiety.

For some minutes, Henry gazed fixedly at the pale features of the Queen. They were placid as those of a slumbering child.

His countenance betrayed no emotion, but painful thoughts agitated his breast. He had determined never to see her again in life. But now that all was over, as he deemed, he could look upon her once more. Such had been his idea when Cranmer brought him tidings of

her death, and, yielding to the impulse, he had come privily to the Tower with that sole purpose.

During the whole of the solemn ceremonial, he had remained in the gallery of the chapel.

He could not remove his gaze from her, so struck was he by the angelic expression of her countenance. Could she have been guilty, and wear such a look in death? Purity itself seemed stamped on that marble brow.

Some compunction visited his breast, and he almost wished she still lived, when, as if to gratify his new-born desire, a slight glow began to chase away the mortal pallor from her features.

Scarcely believing what he saw, he bent towards her, and became convinced that it was no illusion.

A miracle had been wrought in his behalf.

"Merciful heaven," he exclaimed, in tones that startled all the hearers. "She lives!—she breathes!"

Cranmer and Kingston, who were standing behind, advanced a few paces, and were struck with astonishment.

But the lieutenant instantly divined the truth, and whispered to the King, "She must have taken a sleeping-potion!"

"May be so," rejoined Henry. "We shall see anon."

Lady Rochford, Borlase and his wife, and all those who were in the secret, comprehended what had happened, and trembled with fear.

Henry continued intently watching the Queen.

By this time, sensibility had returned to her.

She heaved a profound sigh, which was distinctly heard amid the deep stillness that pervaded the place.

She next slowly raised herself, but being still only half conscious, she ejaculated, "Adrian, where are you?"

The exclamation made the King recoil.

It was as audible as the previous sigh had been throughout the chapel, and completed Lady Rochford's distress.

"Alas, she has destroyed herself!" she mentally exclaimed.

"You heard that, my lord?" observed Henry, in a stern, deep tone, to Cranmer. "She calls on her paramour!"

Dazzled by the tapers, Catherine gazed around with a scared and bewildered look, till, at last, her eye settled upon the King, whose terrible aspect almost caused her to relapse into insensibility.

"You there, sire!" she ejaculated.

"Ay, 'tis not he you expected!" rejoined Henry, sternly. "Adrian is gone to his account!"

"I know it!—I know it!" she cried, pressing her hand to her throbbing temples. "I shall meet him in heaven!"

"Perchance, not there, if you die unanealed!" rejoined the King, still more sternly.

"I have confessed all my sins, Henry, and have received absolution for them!" she cried.

"You have not confessed the greatest of your crimes —the wrong you have done my honour!"

"I have never wronged you, Henry," she exclaimed.

"Why, then, that cry? Why was your first thought for Adrian? Ha! you are self-convicted!"

"Aid me!" exclaimed Catherine, in a voice that brought Lady Rochford and Agnes instantly to her help.

Quickly released, she threw herself at the King's feet.

"Mercy, sire!" she exclaimed. "I have endured the bitterness of death. Is not that punishment enough for a crime I have never committed?"

"Offended heaven would not permit your escape, but brought me hither to prevent it," rejoined Henry, in a terrible voice.

"Would that some pitying saint had stopped him!" muttered Borlase, groaning internally.

"Whence did you obtain the potion?" demanded Henry. "Answer that question."

Borlase awaited the reply in mortal terror.

"From him whom you have unjustly sacrificed to your vengeance, sire," returned Catherine, rising.

"Unjustly! Ha!" exclaimed Henry, in a furious tone.

"Unjustly, sire," repeated Catherine, firmly. "You had no more loyal servant than Adrian."

"I thought so once, but I now know otherwise," rejoined the King.

And he turned to depart, but was stayed by Cranmer, who inclined before him.

"Sire," said the Archbishop, "I beseech you to hear me. After what has happened, it will be most consistent with your dignity to pardon her who has offended you. You will thereby gain a character for clemency that will redound greatly to your honour, and exalt you in the esteem of all your subjects."

"Cranmer, do you indeed urge this?" demanded Henry, surprised.

"I do, sire," replied the Archbishop.

At that moment, a tall, thin figure issued from the side aisles, and approached the King. It was the old Duchess of Norfolk.

"Do you come to sue for mercy, madam?" said Henry.

"Not for myself, sire," she replied. "I disdain to ask my life, since you deem it justly forfeited. But I

would save you from the remorse that will inevitably be yours, if you now execute Catherine Howard."

The King looked unmoved, and replied sternly, "I can feel no remorse for an act of justice, approved by my Council, by Parliament, and by the whole realm."

"She has not been condemned by the law, but in defiance of the law," said the Duchess, firmly. "Hear me, sire. The Duke, my husband, rendered you many signal services. He was the victor of Flodden. In consideration of that well-won fight, pardon his granddaughter."

"In consideration of the Duke's services, which I have not forgotten, I pardon you, madam," said Henry.

"I do not thank you for your grace, sire," replied the Duchess. "I would give my life for hers!"

"No more!" cried Henry, motioning her to retire.

"Kingston," he added to the lieutenant, "I shall forthwith return to Greenwich. See that no further mishap occurs, or you shall answer for it with your head."

"None shall occur, sire," replied Kingston. "The scaffold is erected on the green, near St. Peter's Chapel. When is it your pleasure that the execution shall take place?"

"To-morrow, at the hour previously appointed," rejoined Henry.

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Catherine, in a faint voice.

And she fell into the arms of Lady Rochford.

"Are both to suffer, sire?" inquired the lieutenant.

"Both," returned Henry. "Let me not hear from you again till all is over."

And he quitted the chapel, followed by Cranmer.

XXXII.

CATHERINE'S LAST HOURS.

A GLOOMY morn arose on the Tower.

The Bulwark Gate was closed, and none were permitted to enter the fortress.

The few hours left them were passed by Catherine and Lady Rochford in fitting preparations for eternity.

The old Duchess of Norfolk remained with her granddaughter to the last, and helped to reconcile her to her fate. Long before the hour arrived, Catherine had become completely resigned.

The same scaffold that had been stained with the blood of Anne Boleyn, was reared on the self-same spot where it had stood on that melancholy occasion.

It was scarcely light, when Botolph was occupied in scattering straw on the boards, and in arranging the block.

While he was thus employed, a man wrapped in a long black gown hurried towards the scaffold, and quickly mounted the steps. It was Borlase.

"I have come to tell you that our scheme has failed," said the chirurgeon.

"I guessed as much, when I heard the King had been at the Tower," rejoined Botolph, shrugging his shoulders.

"Satan must have brought him to rob us of our reward," said Borlase.

"I care not so much for the reward," rejoined Botolph. "But I would fain have saved the poor Queen. 'Tis

plain, the lieutenant must fear a rescue, or he would not have ordered the gates to be shut."

"Nothing can be done with Mauger, I suppose?" observed the chirurgeon.

"Nothing," responded Botolph. "The sole chance is gone."

Borlase said no more. Descending from the scaffold, he entered St. Peter's Chapel, the door of which was partially open.

No one was in the building, but a lantern placed on the railing showed that a grave had been dug within the chancel.

While Borlase was still within the chapel, the two monks who had previously served as bearers came in with a coffin.

"You will not have to bury an empty coffin now," observed the chirurgeon, as they set it down.

"Alas! no," said one of them. "Pity she was ever awakened from her sleep! What a heart the King must have, not to be melted by her angel looks!"

"He is a fell tyrant!" cried the other. "Women were never butchered in this fashion till his time."

"You are right," said Borlase. "Treat her reverently when she is delivered into your hands."

On his way back to the palace, the chirurgeon encountered the headsmann Mauger, limping towards the scaffold, with his axe upon his shoulder.

"All will be over in an hour," he remarked, with a grim smile. "And the King will be free to take a sixth spouse."

Presently, the chapel bell began to toll, and the gates of the palace being thrown open, the young Queen, who

was destined to be sacrificed to the vengeance of a relentless tyrant, issued forth.

She was accompanied by Lady Rochford, and with them was Agnes, and two other female attendants.

A party of halberdiers escorted them to the fatal spot, and the sad procession was headed by Sir William Kingston.

Catherine had already bidden an eternal farewell to her aged relative, who was now praying fervently for her. And it may here be mentioned that the venerable Duchess did not survive her unfortunate granddaughter many days.

Though the Queen felt very faint, she exhibited no signs of weakness, but maintained a perfectly composed demeanour—the expression of her countenance being that of entire resignation.

Neither she nor her companion looked around. Their thoughts were fixed above. The world had faded from their view.

Very few persons were gathered round the scaffold, and all these were painfully affected as the Queen drew nigh. Several women threw themselves on their knees, and clasping their hands, uttered loud lamentations.

She ascended the steps of the scaffold quickly, but shuddered at the sight of the masked executioner. The Chaplain of the Tower, who was standing to receive her, instantly interposed between her and the hideous object.

With the aid of Agnes, her preparations were quickly made, and after tenderly embracing Lady Rochford, she knelt down at the block, and her slender and snow-white neck was severed at a blow.

Shrieks arose as the head fell.

While this dreadful tragedy was enacted, the coffin had been brought forward by the monks, and the lifeless and mangled frame of the Queen was immediately placed within it, and borne inside the chapel.

With the fall of a second beauteous head, the last act of Henry's vengeance was consummated.

THE END.

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